From the pages of THE SANDMAN

Lucifer

BOOK FIVE

Mike
Carey

Peter Gross
Ryan Kelly
Colleen Doran
Michael Wm. Kaluta
Zander Cannon
Dean Ormston

"Moving, funny, insightful."
— PopMatters

VERTIGO

LUCIFER BOOK FIVE

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LUCIFER BOOK FIVE

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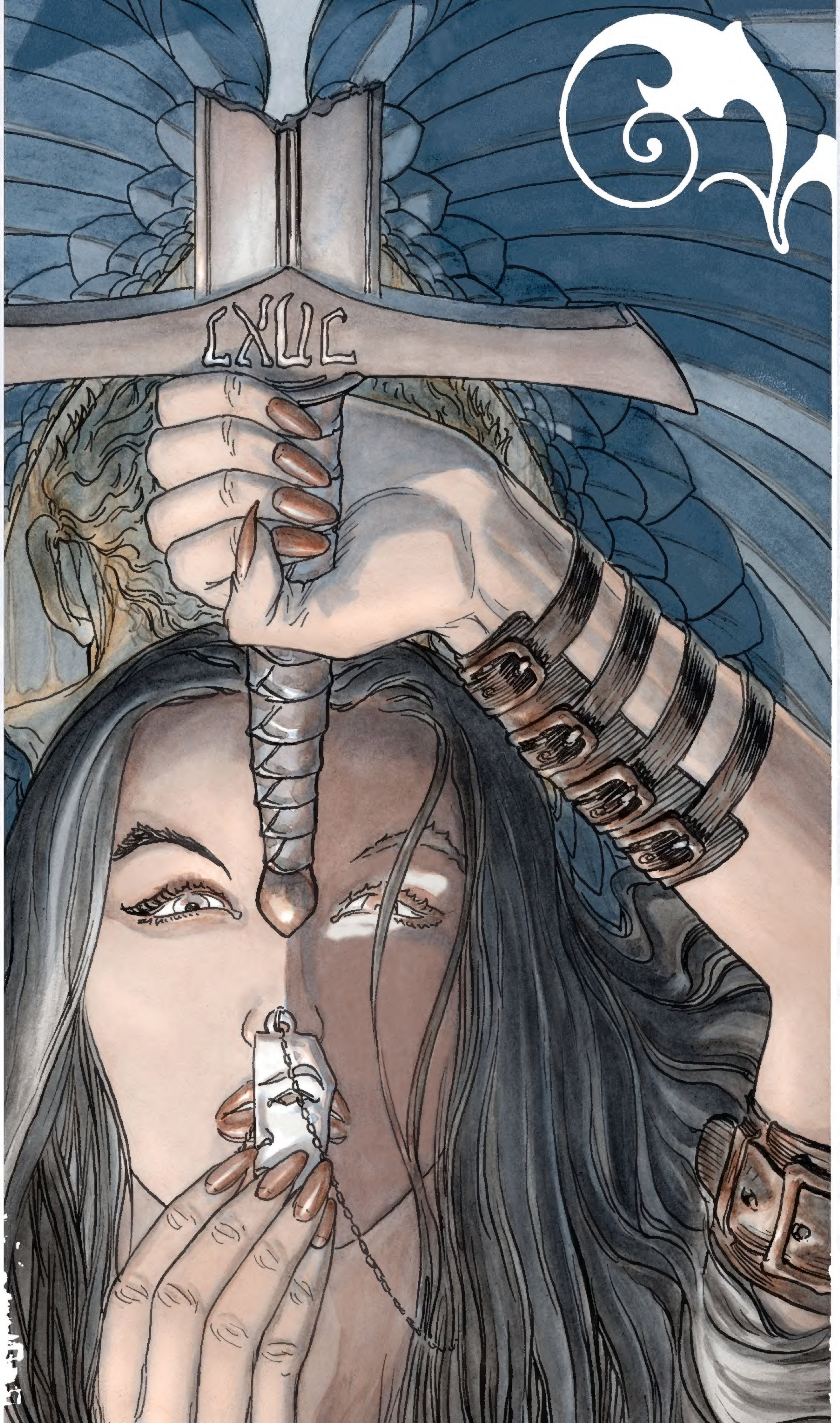

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INTRODUCTION

This final volume in the LUCIFER omnibus edition includes both the epic finale, "Morningstar," and the extended coda that we decided to call "Evensong." In the original plan, and all the way along the line, "Morningstar" was meant to be where the story ended. It was our editor Shelly Bond who asked the leading question: "Don't you want to say goodbye to all these people?" She meant our cast, not our audience. We still bump into you guys all the time, but once we dropped the final curtain that would be all she wrote as far as our characters were concerned. Barring the occasional accident, we wouldn't get to voice them or depict them anymore.

So we said yes, let's have a coda, and the coda became a whole big arc with probably as many hellos in it as goodbyes. It also had, casually dropped into the middle, a story that was sort of a manifesto and sort of an audition piece for the next project that Peter and I would embark on together: THE UNWRITTEN.

The story I'm referring to is "Fireside Tales" from issue #70, which dips its toe in meta-fictional waters by virtue of being set at a storytelling contest and depicting three of the tales offered up in competition. The theme of the contest, announced in the first story, is "lies." The first offering is a supernatural horror story which shows how destructive lies can be. The second is a bawdy comedy suggesting — in rebuttal — that ignorance can be bliss and that truth can be a reef that wrecks us.

Then Martin (whom alert readers will remember from the story "Stitchglass Slide" in LUCIFER BOOK FOUR) stands up and does his thing — which plays off both of the preceding entries' themes. Martin's story is about a lie that a woman tells in order to save the life of the man she loves, although her words cost her (as she knew she they would) her own life. Martin draws the explicit moral: "All stories are lies, but good stories are lies made of light and fire. They lift our hearts out of the dust and out of the grave."

I had a specific story in mind when I wrote that: Neil Gaiman's million-stranded epic THE SANDMAN, which was the great tree from which LUCIFER sprouted. "Fireside Tales" deliberately mimics, in its structure, the issue of THE SANDMAN in which four undertakers keeping vigil over a corpse swap stories to while the night away (issue #55, "Cerements," collected in THE SANDMAN VOL. 8: WORLDS' END). So "Fireside Tales" was in microcosm what the whole of LUCIFER was: a meditation on themes that Gaiman introduced using characters that Gaiman created and storytelling tropes that Gaiman invented and refined. Obviously we put our own blood and sweat and tears into the mix as well, but it bears saying — we were in that direct line of descent, and privileged to be there.

But there's a broader point here about storytelling, and it's one we believe in passionately and develop at greater length in THE UNWRITTEN. Stories are lies, yes. Lies are seen as being in direct opposition to truth, to reality, and the comparison usually portrays truth as a *de facto* good. Plato wanted to ban storytellers from his ideal republic for exactly this reason — because when you call a spade a spade, storytellers are just gods-damned liars.

We don't disagree, Peter and I. We'd only say that stories are what all of us human beings live by. Every single thing that matters to us takes the form of a narrative: our religions and philosophies, our politics and moral codes, our group affiliations on every level. These are the stories that we buy into and build our lives on. Every family has a story of its own history, often with minority reports hovering at the edges of it. Every nation does the same thing on a bigger scale. Our own personalities are narratives, created retrospectively to paper over the paradoxes, enigmas and inconsistencies in the way we behave.

So a storyteller is a liar. We tell lies for a living. But, all things considered, that's a pretty noble calling. When they work, when they move and challenge and delight us, stories are lies to live by.

And maybe, in the image that Martin chooses, there's another sly nod to the particular story which Peter and I had been telling (at that point) for six years. "Good stories are lies made of light and fire." And Lucifer, whose name means Lightbringer, is commonly referred to as the Father of Lies. Our Lucifer actually has something of an obsession with truth, in a narrow and legalistic sense, but he's the lie that we set ourselves to tell, and we loved the time we spent with him.

I recently spent a fascinating evening with Michael Chemers, author of *Ghost Light* and *Staging Stigma*. One of the subjects we discussed was the new light being shed by recent primate studies on our kinship with apes and monkeys and the crucial points where we part company from them. Apes are great at cooperating where there's an immediate and obvious shared benefit, but they hit a brick wall in situations where the collaboration would benefit one party and not the other. "They need to decide to trust," Michael said. "That means having a mental model of how the other ape might share out the proceeds of the shared labor. And they just can't do it. That's why apes don't build hospitals."

In other words, for want of a story the battle was lost.

We bang this drum fairly often in THE UNWRITTEN, but it really does feel as though a lot of strands in contemporary physics, psychology, anthropology and cultural theory are converging on the same insight: strip away the outer layers of anything and what you'll find behind it is a narrative, or something that stands in for a narrative.

And that goes for stories themselves. Stories are built on other stories; the bones of other stories are buried in their foundations. Our Lucifer is Gaiman's Lucifer, and Blake's, and Milton's, and Blue Flint Girl's Atse'Hashke, and Esa-Kira's Maker. Something old, we figured, and something new. Except that nothing is ever new. And in stories nothing ever gets old. Not really. Nothing ever ends. As soon as you open the book to the first page, you're there again. The principal players take their places, and you're one of them. In fact — and obviously — you're all of them.

Welcome back. We're just about to start.

— Mike Carey
London, July 2014

Mk Kaluta '05

GOD IS *JUST,* AND HIS JUSTICE IS A THING OF *TERRIBLE* BEAUTY.
I FOUND A *BANK* IN SWITZERLAND WHICH KNOWINGLY SOLD ON ART TREASURES LOOTED FROM *HOLOCAUST* VICTIMS.
THE OWNER, NILS RAUDEN, IS CURRENTLY *ENTOMBED* IN HIS OWN SOUNDPROOF VAULT.
IN ENGLAND I MET A FORMER SOLDIER FROM THE FIRST *PARATROOP* REGIMENT, AND GAVE HIM THE NAME OF A *CHILD.*
THE NAME WAS ALL THAT WAS *NEEDED.*
IN AMERICA, A *PHARMACOLOGIST* WHO SUPPRESSED NEGATIVE TEST DATA ON A NEW *DRUG* AS A FAVOR TO ITS MAKERS--
--*SAMPLED* THE PRODUCT CONCERNED IN *LIFE-ALTERING* AMOUNTS.
IT IS NOT *ENOUGH.* THE WORLDS ARE ENDING, AND MY WORK IS NOT YET *DONE.*
BUT I HAVE ENVISAGED AN *ENGINE,* ITS MOVING PARTS PEOPLE, WHICH MIGHT *ASSIST* ME IN MY TASK.
IT WOULD BE LIKE A *WATCH,* EXQUISITE AND REMORSELESS. ONE COG TURNING *ANOTHER* UNTIL THE MOMENT OF CRISIS IS REACHED.
IT WOULD BE LIKE A *CHARIOT*--
--CRUSHING THE *UNJUST* BENEATH ITS WHEELS.

The Wheels of God

MIKE CAREY writer
COLLEEN DORAN guest artist
JARED K. FLETCHER letterer
DANIEL VOZZO colorist
MICHAEL Wm. KALUTA cover painter
MARIAH HUEHNER editor
Based on characters created by
GAIMAN, KIETH AND DRINGENBERG

BEGIN HERE. IN HAMBURG, WITH JAN LIEBERT, INSPECTOR OF POLICE.
HIS JURISDICTION VICE, AND HIS AVOCATION CORRUPTION.
I DON'T GET IT.
IT'S SIMPLE ENOUGH. AT ELEVEN P.M. THIS EVENING, THE SAFE IN THE EVIDENCE ROOM WILL BE UNLOCKED.
THE PAPERWORK RELATING TO THE HEROIN SEIZED LAST WEEK WILL HAVE BEEN MISPLACED. YOU CAN HELP YOURSELF.
NO, IT'S YOU I DON'T GET. I MEAN, WHERE'S YOUR CUT? WHAT ARE YOU GETTING OUT OF THIS?
I'M DOING A FAVOR FOR MARTIN MESSER.
HE'LL TAKE THE STUFF OFF YOUR HANDS-- AND HE'S EXPECTING TO SEE YOU TONIGHT.
I DON'T KNOW. THE LAST TIME I DID THIS--
--SOME KIDS--
--THERE WAS AN ACCIDENT--
THE JUNK YOU WERE SELLING WAS DOCTORED. A SCHOOL BUS GOT IN BETWEEN YOU AND SOME IRATE CUSTOMERS.
WELL, IT'S YOUR CHOICE. BUT DON'T WASTE MY TIME.
OKAY. I'M IN.
EXCELLENT. TONIGHT, THEN.

BUT THIS ONE I WILL *NOT* USE.
AND *CLENCH.*
HOLD IT-- HOLD IT--
HIS NAME IS *JAYESH,* AND HE IS AN *INNOCENT.*
OKAY, THAT'S *PATHETIC.*
YOU'RE LETTING GO AS SOON AS IT *STARTS* TO HURT.
NOT ONE OF THOSE WHOM I AM GIVEN TO *JUDGE.*
I'M A HOPELESS *CASE,* DIETER.
ONLY *PSYCHOLOGICALLY.*
YOU SHOULD GET *ANGRY* SOMETIMES. IT WOULD DO YOU GOOD.
ANGRY ABOUT *WHAT?* I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT *HAPPENED* TO ME.
SOME MEN *JUMPED* ME IN AN ALLEY, AND I WOKE UP EIGHT MONTHS *LATER.*
AND THERE'S NO *POINT* IN GETTING ANGRY.
GOD GIVES WITH *ONE* HAND, AND TAKES AWAY--
YEAH, I *HEARD* THAT BULLSHIT. DON'T TELL IT TO ME *AGAIN.*
YOU WANT TO GO HOME IN AN *AMBULANCE* TODAY?
I CAN PROBABLY *SWING* IT.
NO THANKS. SOMEONE'S PICKING ME *UP.*

NO, JAYESH DEVA IS NOT A *COMPONENT* IN MY HUMAN MACHINE.
I HAVE SEEN HIS *NIGHTMARES.*
THE POWER THAT *MOVES* ME LETS ME EXPERIENCE EVERY *CURSE,* AND EVERY *BLOW.*
HE STRIVES-- ALMOST SUCCESSFULLY-- TO FORGET. I *PLEDGE* MYSELF TO REMEMBER.
I OFFER MYSELF TO *AVENGE.*
HI.
HI.
SO *THIS* ONE--
SOMEONE THREW THEMSELVES UNDER A *BUS* AT BLUMENSTRASSE.
SUICIDE SEEMS TO BE THIS YEAR'S HOT *TREND.*
--THIS ONE IS *MINE.*

ARE WE IN A *HURRY?*
I LEFT THAT ENGLISH *EXCHANGE* STUDENT IN CHARGE OF THE SHOP.
SHE'S PROBABLY PUT HALF OF OUR FIRST EDITIONS IN THE *BARGAIN* BIN BY NOW.
IT WAS *GOOD* OF YOU TO COME DOWN AND PICK ME UP, KARL.
I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU *WORRY* ABOUT--
...
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? WAS IT A BAD *SESSION?*
NO, I-- I'M *FINE.* I JUST--
SOMEONE WALKED OVER MY *GRAVE.*

THE SECOND COMPONENT IS THIS MAN. MARTIN MESSER.
LET'S SAY I WAS INTERESTED. WHAT THEN?
HAMBURG'S MOST PROSPEROUS RACKETEER AND MOST INDISCRIMINATE PIMP.
THEN THE COP IN QUESTION WOULD CALL ON YOU TONIGHT.
WITH A SAMPLE OF THE MERCHANDISE?
OF COURSE. YOU TASTE. YOU TEST. YOU DECIDE.
I CAN EASE THE PROBLEM OF DISTRIBUTION, TOO. I'VE MADE FRIENDLY LINKS WITH A LOCAL COUNCILLOR.
MAEVA BOHM. SHE'D LIKE TO BE IN ON THIS MEETING.
BOHM! THAT BITCH GOT IN ON A CLEAN-UP TICKET, AND SHE'S GIVEN US GRIEF EVER SINCE.
HER AGENDA HAS CHANGED.
JUDGE FOR YOURSELF WHEN YOU MEET HER.
WELL, YOU GOT MY FUCKING ATTENTION, FRIEND.
USE IT WISELY.

R TASC RM
HOLLY, WHEN I SAID THAT YOU SHOULD ARRANGE THIS SECTION IN *ORDER*--
--THE ORDER I HAD IN *MIND* WAS ALPHABETICAL.
BUT IT'S HISTORY, KARL. CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER MAKES SO MUCH MORE SENSE.
YEAH, BUT CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF *PUBLICATION* IS JUST SURREAL.
LET'S PUT IT *BACK* THE WAY IT WAS, AND PRETEND THIS DIDN'T *HAPPEN.*
KARL, EVERY TIME I SEE THAT *TATTOO,* I WANT TO *ASK* YOU--
--WHAT DOES *"DEU"* MEAN?
DEU
SIEG
IT MEANS "I USED TO BE A COMPLETE *ASSHOLE,* BUT I GOT *BETTER."*
WOW.
I DIDN'T KNOW GERMAN COULD BE THAT *CONCISE.*

THAT SMELLS *AMAZING.*
IT'S JUST *TUNA* STEAK, JAYESH.
I'M FRYING IT WITH LEMON GRASS AND BASIL.
I DUNNO, KARL. YOU WORK A FULL *DAY* IN THE SHOP.
PICK ME UP FROM *PHYSIO.* COOK MY *MEALS--*
YES. BECAUSE IF YOU ATE YOUR FATHER'S *CURRIES* I'D PASS OUT EVERY TIME YOU KISSED ME.
DON'T MAKE A *JOKE* OUT OF IT. SOMETIMES IT'S LIKE THE WHOLE *WORLD* IS FALLING TO PIECES.
ALL THESE *DEATH* PACTS AND SELF-MUTILATIONS. THE *RIOTS* IN MUNICH...
BUT YOU'RE ALWAYS *THERE* FOR ME. KEEPING ME *TOGETHER.*
KARL DAHMUTTER *TAKES* THESE THANKS IN SILENCE.
THEY TWIST IN HIS *HEART* LIKE RAZOR WIRE.
THEY ARE HIS *PENANCE.* HIS *MORTIFICATION.*
PERHAPS HE IMAGINES THEY ARE *ENOUGH.*

MAEVA BOHM.
YOU HAVE THE AUDACITY TO SAY THAT TO ME?
ARE YOU MAD?
STEP THREE.
YOU CAME HERE TO MEET ME. CLEARLY I'M NOT MAD.
ABSURD.
FOR ALL YOU KNOW, I'M WEARING A WIRE.
OR YOU'RE AFRAID THAT I AM. COUNCILLOR, YOUR ELECTION PROMISE WAS TO CHASE THE DRUG DEALERS OUT OF ST. PAULI.
MARTIN MESSER IS THE BIGGEST AND THE BUSIEST OF THEM. AND HE'S PREPARED TO WORK WITH YOU.
GIVE HIM THE POLICE DEPLOYMENT ROTAS FOR NIEDERHAFEN. MAKE IT EASY FOR HIM TO MOVE SHOP.
AND YOU'LL HAVE ACHIEVED EVERYTHING YOU SAID YOU WOULD-- AT A STROKE.
MESSER'S SEX CLUB-- THE GAULEITER. MIDNIGHT.
HE'S EXPECTING YOU.

—A—
CONCORDANCE
—TO—
SHAKESPEARE
"OH, MY OFFENCE IS *RANK*. IT SMELLS TO *HEAVEN*."
WH--WHAT?
"IT HAS THE PRIMAL, ELDEST *CURSE* UPON IT."
JUST THINKING *ALOUD*. IT MUST BE ALMOST *UNBEARABLE*.
LIVING WITH THE *FEAR* THAT HE'LL FIND YOU OUT.
HEY, WE'RE CLOSED. I'M CALLING THE *POLICE* IF YOU DON'T--
THE POLICE CAN'T *HELP* YOU.
WHAT?
A *PRIEST* MIGHT BE A BETTER BET.
HE COULD TAKE YOUR *CONFESSION*.

YOU COULD SAY "FATHER, I WAS ASHAMED OF MY OWN NATURE. I LOOKED WITH LUST UPON A MAN--"
NO. NO, THAT ISN'T--
"--BUT I WAS AFRAID TO TELL HIM. AFRAID OF MY FRIENDS' MOCKERY."
"SO I HELPED THEM TO BEAT THE SHIT OUT OF HIM.
"I BETRAYED HIM BECAUSE I WAS AFRAID TO LOVE HIM.
UFFF! YOU'RE CRAZY, MAN! THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN!
I WASN'T THERE!
OH, YOU WERE THERE.
"WHEN GUNTHER GAVE YOU THE BOTTLE, AND HIS BLESSING.
"AND TOLD YOU TO PROVE YOURSELF.
"AND YOU DID, KARL. YOU SHOWED THEM ALL WHAT YOU REALLY ARE.
"DISPELLED EVERY POSSIBILITY OF DOUBT, OR AMBIGUITY."
OH GOD! OH GOD!
YES. HE WAS THERE TOO.
HE SAW YOUR GUILT.

EIGHT *MONTHS* IN A COMA. HIS SPINE SO BADLY DAMAGED HE'LL NEVER *WALK* AGAIN.
PLEASE! PLEASE, DON'T!
BUT THE HOLES IN HIS *MEMORY* ARE USEFUL. HE ACCEPTS YOU AS A *FRIEND.*
THE FRIEND WHO CHASED HIS *ATTACKERS* AWAY.
THE FRIEND WHO SAVED HIS *LIFE.* ISN'T THAT WHAT HE *BELIEVES?*
YES! BUT--
AND YOU THINK THERE IS A *SCALE* WHERE BEING KIND TO HIM NOW *BALANCES* YOUR EARLIER SINS?
I-- I WANT HIM TO BE *HAPPY!*
OF *COURSE* YOU DO. BUT HAPPINESS IS *INTANGIBLE.*
WHAT *I* PROPOSE IS MORE STRAIGHT-FORWARD. YOU WILL *KILL* A MAN FOR ME.
THE *GAULEITER* CLUB ON THE REEPERBAHN. HALF PAST *MIDNIGHT.* MEET ME OUTSIDE--
"--OR I'LL TELL JAYESH WHAT HE *REALLY* HAS TO THANK YOU FOR."

JUSTICE IS AN *EQUATION,* STARK AND *GREAT* IN ITS SIMPLICITY.
HERE. NOW. I WILL PUT A *GUN* INTO THE HAND OF THE SELF-PITYING *THUG.*
AND HAVE HIM *EXECUTE* THE CORRUPT POLICEMAN.
WHEN THE *POLICE* ARRIVE, THE GANGSTER WILL BE FOUND WITH A MILLION DEUTSCHMARK'S WORTH OF DRUGS ALREADY *STAMPED* AS POLICE PROPERTY.
AND THE *POLITICIAN* WILL BE FOUND WITH THE *GANGSTER.*
THE WHEELS *TURN,* AND JUSTICE IS SQUEEZED OUT OF THEM LIKE SWEET *WINE.*
LIEBERT *DEAD.* MESSER *CAGED.* BOHM DEPOSED AND *FRIENDLESS.*
THE *BOY* EITHER HUNTED DOWN OR SLAIN.
I *PRAISE* YOU, LORD.
I DEDICATE TO *YOU* WHAT MY HANDS HAVE *MADE.*

YOU STILL HAVE A *CHOICE.*
EVEN IF IT'S *ALL* YOU HAVE.

ALL RIGHT. I'LL DO IT.
YES. I *KNOW.*
JUSTUS ES, DOMINE, ET RECTISSIMUM ***JUDICIUM*** TUUM.
THERE'S ONLY ***ONE*** BULLET.
BUT THEN, THAT'S ALL YOU'LL ***NEED.***

"I HAVE CLOAKED YOU IN *DARKNESS* AND *SILENCE.*
"SO NOBODY WILL *SEE* YOU AS YOU WALK THROUGH THE CORRIDORS OF THIS *BABYLON.*
"NOBODY WILL *HEAR* YOUR STEPS.
"PRAY *ALOUD,* IF YOU LIKE.
"NO ONE WILL *LISTEN.*
WHEN YOU COME TO A DOOR WITH THE NAME OF *MESSER* UPON IT, OPEN IT AND GO *INSIDE.*
"MESSER. IT MEANS *KNIFE.*
MESSER
"BUT THE MAN *DELUDES* HIMSELF.
"HE IS SOFT *FLESH,* LIKE ANYONE ELSE."

WELL, IT'S GOOD *STUFF.*
BUT THE *DISTRIBUTION?* WITH THE POLICE *DEPLOYMENT* CHARTS, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO--
I'LL BE SETTING UP SHOP DOWN AT THE *PORT,* COUNCILLOR. YOU CAN REST *EASY.*
...
WHAT THE *FUCK?*
YOU'RE IN THE WRONG *PLACE,* KID. THE STRIPPERS ARE *THAT* WAY.
NO.
I COULDN'T CARE *LESS* ABOUT THE STRIPPERS.
I CAME HERE TO *KILL* YOU.
TCHIK
WELL, *GOOD.*
IT'S ABOUT TIME *SOMEONE* DID.

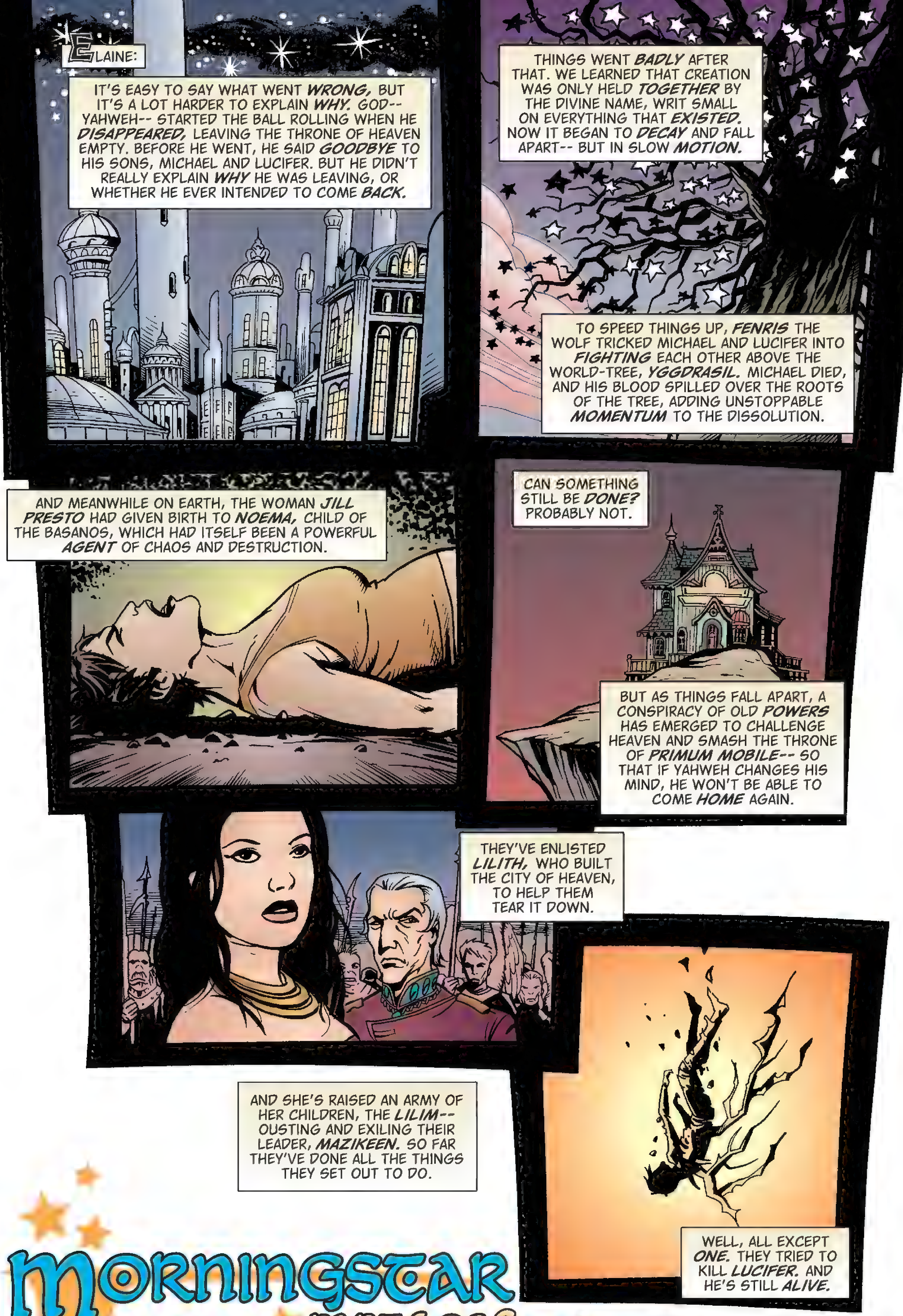
DO IT. I *DESERVE* IT.
NO? THEN LET *ME.*
DROP IT, MESSER.
I SAID DROP IT. AND TELL THE *SCISSOR* SISTERS TO SIT ON THEIR *HANDS.*
ARE YOU CRAZY? WHO *KNOWS* WHAT THE LITTLE FUCK HEARD?
COUNCILLOR, YOU'RE A *DISGRACE* TO YOUR OFFICE.
I-- I--
THIS MAN YOU WERE ABOUT TO GET SO *COZY* WITH-- HE HAS *BLOOD* ON HIS HANDS.
CHILDREN'S BLOOD. HE MURDERS *CHILDREN.* AND SO DO I.
GET *OUT* OF HERE. TAKE THIS *LUNATIC* WITH YOU.
AND KEEP YOUR *PROMISES.*
BUT--
BUT I *HAVE* TO--
PLEASE. WE CAN'T BE *FOUND* HERE.
WE HAVE TO *GO.* NOW.

NOW HERE WE ALL *ARE.* IN A ROOMFUL OF *HEROIN.*
YOU'RE NOT WALKING OUT OF THIS *ALIVE,* YOU PIECE OF SHIT.
I *KNOW.*
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM

MY ENGINE HAS *MISCARRIED,* FOR REASONS WHICH AS YET ARE *UNCLEAR* TO ME.
I MUST FALL BACK ON MORE *MUNDANE* METHODOLOGIES.
YOUR EQUATION DOESN'T *BALANCE,* SOLOMON.
YOU'VE LEFT OUT TOO MANY CRUCIAL *VARIABLES.*
MELEOS! WHY DO YOU STAY MY HAND, ANGEL?
I DO GOD'S WORK.
DO YOU?
I *LEFT* THE HOST BECAUSE GOD WOULD NEVER *TELL* US WHAT HIS WORK WAS.
AND NOW, OF COURSE, IT'S TOO LATE TO *ASK* HIM.

HE CARES ABOUT JUSTICE! HIS WORK IS JUSTICE!
HE APPOINTED ME TO ENACT AND EMBODY IT!
PERHAPS. OR PERHAPS YOU ENACT A DRAMA OF YOUR OWN MAKING.
YOU-- WILL NOT TEMPT ME. YOU WILL NOT MAKE ME SWERVE FROM MY PURPOSE.
GOD FORBID.
HEAVEN NEEDS YOU, MOST INCORRUPTIBLE OF JUDGES.
I AM SENT TO BRING YOU THERE.

IT HURTS ME, STILL, TO LEAVE SO MUCH UNDONE.
AND I STILL HAVE FAITH IN THE TOOLS I USED.
BUT PERHAPS THE ANGEL IS RIGHT.
PERHAPS MY UNDERSTANDING IS INCOMPLETE.
He already knows. He has always known.
IF IT IS SO, IT IS SO BECAUSE STRICT JUSTICE DEMANDS THAT I DO NOT SYMPATHIZE TOO MUCH.
THAT I DO NOT INTERROGATE THEIR HEARTS WHILE I WEIGH THEIR SINS.
OR PRY INTO THEIR DREAMS.
OR KEEP A TALLY OF THEIR PRAYERS.


ELAINE:
IT'S EASY TO SAY WHAT WENT *WRONG,* BUT IT'S A LOT HARDER TO EXPLAIN *WHY.* GOD-- YAHWEH-- STARTED THE BALL ROLLING WHEN HE *DISAPPEARED,* LEAVING THE THRONE OF HEAVEN EMPTY. BEFORE HE WENT, HE SAID *GOODBYE* TO HIS SONS, MICHAEL AND LUCIFER. BUT HE DIDN'T REALLY EXPLAIN *WHY* HE WAS LEAVING, OR WHETHER HE EVER INTENDED TO COME *BACK.*
THINGS WENT *BADLY* AFTER THAT. WE LEARNED THAT CREATION WAS ONLY HELD *TOGETHER* BY THE DIVINE NAME, WRIT SMALL ON EVERYTHING THAT *EXISTED.* NOW IT BEGAN TO *DECAY* AND FALL APART-- BUT IN SLOW *MOTION.*
TO SPEED THINGS UP, *FENRIS* THE WOLF TRICKED MICHAEL AND LUCIFER INTO *FIGHTING* EACH OTHER ABOVE THE WORLD-TREE, *YGGDRASIL.* MICHAEL DIED, AND HIS BLOOD SPILLED OVER THE ROOTS OF THE TREE, ADDING UNSTOPPABLE *MOMENTUM* TO THE DISSOLUTION.
AND MEANWHILE ON EARTH, THE WOMAN *JILL PRESTO* HAD GIVEN BIRTH TO *NOEMA,* CHILD OF THE BASANOS, WHICH HAD ITSELF BEEN A POWERFUL *AGENT* OF CHAOS AND DESTRUCTION.
CAN SOMETHING STILL BE *DONE?* PROBABLY NOT.
BUT AS THINGS FALL APART, A CONSPIRACY OF OLD *POWERS* HAS EMERGED TO CHALLENGE HEAVEN AND SMASH THE THRONE OF *PRIMUM MOBILE--* SO THAT IF YAHWEH CHANGES HIS MIND, HE WON'T BE ABLE TO COME *HOME* AGAIN.
THEY'VE ENLISTED *LILITH,* WHO BUILT THE CITY OF HEAVEN, TO HELP THEM TEAR IT DOWN.
AND SHE'S RAISED AN ARMY OF HER CHILDREN, THE *LILIM--* OUSTING AND EXILING THEIR LEADER, *MAZIKEEN.* SO FAR THEY'VE DONE ALL THE THINGS THEY SET OUT TO DO.
WELL, ALL EXCEPT *ONE.* THEY TRIED TO KILL *LUCIFER.* AND HE'S STILL *ALIVE.*

MORNINGSTAR
PART 1 OF 6

MIKE CAREY writer • PETER GROSS & RYAN KELLY artists
JARED K. FLETCHER lettering • DANIEL VOZZO colors
MICHAEL Wm. KALUTA cover painter • MARIAH HUEHNER editor

Based of characters created by
GAIMAN, KIETH, & DRINGENBERG

SO THAT'S WHERE WE *STAND.* THE WORLDS-- ALL OF CREATION-- *ROT* FROM THE INSIDE OUT.
THE SOULS OF MEN AND WOMEN BLEEDING *AWAY* INTO THE VOID, SO THAT THEY DIE WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING THEY'RE *SICK.*
IN *HELL* THE ANCIENT ORDER SANCTIONED BY GOD HAS BEEN *OVERTHROWN* FOREVER. THE NEW RULER, CHRISTOPHER RUDD, SAYS THE DEMONS AND THE DAMNED HAVE TO BE *FRIENDS* NOW.
BUT HE'S THINKING ABOUT A REVOLUTION EVEN *GREATER* THAN THE ONE HE'S JUST *ENGINEERED.*
WHILE IN *HEAVEN,* THE ANGELS WEIGH UP THE TERRIBLE *CONSEQUENCES* OF EACH AND EVERY COURSE OF *ACTION.*
AND SO THEY DO *NOTHING,* AS THE END COMES EVER *CLOSER.*

CLOSE.
CLOSER.
CLOSEST.
YOU THINK YOU CAN PUT ME *OFF,* MAZIKEEN, BY WALKING THE ROADS OF *IRON* AND THE ROADS OF *FIRE.*
BUT I AM JIN EN MOK.
POWER WITHOUT *SHAPE.* WILL WITHOUT *LIMIT.*
I *KNOW* YOU'RE WOUNDED. I KNOW YOU'RE *TIRING.*
I CAN *SMELL* YOUR PAIN.
BUT YOU'RE JUST A *DISTRACTION* FROM THE LARGER CONFLICT THAT IS TO COME.
OR AT BEST--
--AN *APERITIF.*

I'LL FOLLOW YOUR SPOOR TO THE ENDS OF THE *WORLDS,* LILIM BITCH.
AND I'LL NEVER *SLOW,* OR TURN ASIDE, OR DROP MY *GUARD.*
YOU *WON'T* ESCAPE ME.
HE TALKS FOR HIS *OWN* SAKE, NOT FOR HERS. TELLING THE *STORY* OF THE KILL BEFORE IT HAPPENS.
BUT HER EARS ARE KEEN. AND SHE LISTENS WITH A KIND OF *SATISFACTION.*
IF HE THINKS SHE'S TRYING TO *ESCAPE*--
--THAT'S ALL THE *BETTER.*

IF I COULD HAVE *SEEN* THAT SMILE, I'D PROBABLY HAVE *WELCOMED* IT.
YEAH, IT WAS *SCARY,* BUT IT WAS STILL A *RARE* AND PRECIOUS THING.
BECAUSE THIS WAS A TIME OF *WEEPING.*
IT'S A *GIRL,* JILL!
WELL OKAY, WE *KNEW* THAT ALREADY, BUT LOOK!
RACHEL-- GRANDDAUGHTER--
--WE HAVE *VISITORS.*
PLEASE-- DON'T BE *AFRAID.*
WE DON'T MEAN YOU ANY *HARM.*
DON'T WE, ELAINE?
I THINK THAT REMAINS TO BE *SEEN.*

LUCIFER! IT'S LUCIFER!
GRANDAD, DON'T LET HIM NEAR THE BABY!
LUCIFER! WH-WHY WOULD HE--?
ATSE'HASHKE, THIS IS MY HOUSE, AND YOU WERE NOT INVITED HERE.
I'M WELL AWARE OF THAT.
BUT SOMETHING DREW US HERE. AND SINCE THE MOTHER IN THIS PIETA IS JILL PRESTO--
--IT'S CLEAR ENOUGH WHO WE HAVE TO THANK.
TRUE, LUCIFER.
AS I PASSED THROUGH THE VOID ON MY WAY HERE, I SAW YOU. YOU STOOD OUT AGAINST ALL THAT DARKNESS.
YOU SEEMED TO BE LOST. SO I TURNED YOU IN THIS DIRECTION.
I THOUGHT THIS MIGHT BE A GOOD TIME TO FINISH WHAT LIES BETWEEN US.

I-- I CAN *SEE* HER!
I'M NOT *SURPRISED.* NOEMA'S THE CHILD OF THE *BASANOS.*
AND SHE DID A VERY GOOD JOB OF *HIDING* FROM ME UNTIL SHE WAS READY TO BE *BORN.*
BUT PERHAPS SHE'S FORGOTTEN THAT I MADE A *PROMISE* TO HER FATHER--
--NOT TO *HARM* HER UNLESS SHE THREATENED *ME* FIRST.
VERY *NOBLE,* LIGHTBRINGER. VERY *FORBEARING.*
LUCIFER, I WON'T LET YOU *HURT* HER.
HE *CAN'T* HURT ME. HIS POWER COMES FROM *YAHWEH,* AND IT'S BEEN LEECHING AWAY EVER SINCE GOD *LEFT* THIS PLANE.
BUT HE *DID* KILL MY FATHER. AND LEFT MY *BROTHER* TO DIE IN THE MANSIONS OF THE SILENCE.
BOW TO ME NOW, LUCIFER. BEG MY *FORGIVENESS.* AND *MERCY.*
I DON'T HAVE THE *TIME.*
DON'T *MISTAKE* ME.
I *INSIST.*

"URIEL, SOMETHING IS *HAPPENING.*
"SOMETHING *UNFORESEEN.*"
ON THE PLAIN OF *ARMAGEDDON*-- COUNTLESS LEAGUES *BELOW* THE CITY-- A HOST GATHERS.
A *HOST?*
A HOST OF *WHAT,* ZONAQUEL?
INTELLIGENCE IS *SCANT.* BUT THEY ARE *MANY.*
IT MAY BE THAT THIS IS AN *ATTACK* OF SOME KIND. OR THE *PRELUDE* TO ONE.
WHO WOULD *DARE* TO BROACH THE BORDERS OF HEAVEN?
THE *TITANS* DARED. GYGES AND GARAMAS.
AND ONLY THE *LIGHTBRINGER'S* INTERVENTION SAVED US FROM *DISASTER.*
THEN TAKE A LIGHT *PATROL* FROM AMONG THE THRONES.
SEND THEM TO *RECONNOITER.* BUT HAVE SOME OF THEM HANG *BACK,* AT FIRST.

"YOU'RE *RIGHT,* OF COURSE.
"IN THESE *DARK* DAYS, WE KNOW NOT *WHO* MIGHT COME CALLING."
HALT, MY CHILDREN.
FORM A *PERIMETER.* AND GUARD MY *PERSON.*
WHAT WILL YOU *DO,* MOTHER?
I MADE *PROVISION* FOR THIS MOMENT, MISRAN.
I *BUILT* THE SILVER CITY, AFTER ALL.
IN A WAY--
--IT'S LIKE ANOTHER *CHILD* THAT I HAVE BORNE.

"AND *LOVED*.
"AND *DESPAIRED* OF."
BOW, LUCIFER.
I *MEAN* IT!
STOP THIS.
RIGHT *NOW*.

WHAT DO *YOU* WANT, ANGEL?
THERE ARE *INNOCENTS* HERE. THEIR SAFETY IS MORE *IMPORTANT* THAN YOUR GRUDGES.
MY MOTHER AND THE *MIDWIVES* ARE ALREADY UNDER *MY* PROTECTION.
NOT THEM. THERE WERE *OTHER* SOULS LOST IN THE VOID, AND I *COLLECTED* THEM AS WE PASSED.
I'M GOING TO BRING THEM *OUT,* NOW. AND YOU CAN JUST HOLD YOUR *FIRE,* OKAY?
I DON'T WANT TO HURT *ANYONE* WHO HASN'T HURT *ME* FIRST.
THEY CAN *COME.* BUT THEY'D BETTER NOT INTERFERE WITH ME AND THE MORNINGSTAR.
WATCH HIM, NOEMA. DON'T BE *DISTRACTED.*
RACHEL, THIS IS NOT OUR *FIGHT.*
IT'S *MINE,* GRANDAD.
SARAH. BOBBY. AND-- BEATRICE?
IT MUST HAVE BEEN A *BUMPY* RIDE.

OH GOD! OH GOD!
HOLY *SHIT.*
I WANT MY *DADDY!* WHERE'S MY *DADDY?!*
SARAH, YOUR *HUSBAND--* CHARLIE-- HE WAS--
I KNOW.
DON'T *SAY* IT.
I *KNOW.*
MISTER *LUX.*
BEATRICE.
MISTER LUX WITH BIG BAT *WINGS.*
YOU *KNOW* WHO I AM.
YEAH, I GUESS I DO. FUNNY WORLD, EH?
LISTEN, THERE'S SOMETHING YOU *NEED* TO KNOW.
MAZ IS IN A SHIT LOT OF *TROUBLE.*
HER MOM-- LILITH?-- CAME OUT OF *NOWHERE* WITH SOME FUCKING BIG *TIGER* IN TOW. TOOK OVER THE PLACE.
THEY TIED HER UP-- *BEAT* HER.
I THINK THEY WERE GONNA *KILL* HER.

DEEP LAID PLANS, LUCIFER.
I'M AWARE OF THEM.
NO. YOU'RE ONLY AWARE OF WHAT TOUCHES YOU.
I SEE WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN, AND WHAT COULD HAPPEN.
THE HINGES ON WHICH THE FUTURE TURNS. IF THERE'S GOING TO BE A FUTURE.
I THINK YOU'VE BEEN OUT-MANEUVERED. I THINK YOU'VE BEEN BEATEN.
REALLY?
THIS ISN'T MY UNIVERSE. I'M JUST VISITING.
AND WHAT ABOUT YOUR LOVER?
DON'T YOU FEEL ANY REGRET FOR HER?
FOR MAZIKEEN?
NO.
NOT REALLY.

"I suppose it would have been *entertaining,* though--
"--to see what *became* of those who beat her.
"I'm sure that was a sight worth *seeing.*"

THWK
GLLLUU
SHLUK
YOU'RE NOT *DEAD.* NO NEED TO *PRETEND.*
TELL ME THE *TRUTH,* AND PERHAPS YOU CAN *SURVIVE* THIS.
HHHHHHH--
--HARD TO-- TALK--
--NO-- LUNGS--
IMPROVISE.
GROW YOURSELF SOME.

THERE'S A PLAN. A POINT TO ALL THIS DESTRUCTION.
TELL ME WHAT IT IS.
DESTRUCTION-- IS ITS OWN-- POINT--
YOU ARE-- CRUEL, LADY.
TRUE GRACE-- TRUE ÉLAN-- EVADE YOU.
AT LEAST-- IT IS-- FOR THE JIN EN MOK.
WHEN CREATION ENDS-- WE FLOAT FREE AGAIN. WE ARE-- REBORN-- AS OURSELVES.
FENRIS ENACTS HIS ROLE AS LORD OF ENTROPY.
SANDALPHON WINS THE VICTORY-- THAT WAS DENIED TO LUCIFER.
YOUR MOTHER-- SPITES THE PARADISE-- THAT CAST HER OUT.
THE CITY.
YOU'RE GOING TO ATTACK THE CITY.

WHAT *PASSES* HERE?
STAND BACK. YOU WILL NOT *TOUCH* HER.
IT'S ALL *RIGHT,* MISRAN.
YOU REMEMBER THE *BUILDING* OF THE CITY, ANGEL?
OF COURSE. AND I REMEMBER *YOU,* LILITH.
ON THE LAST DAY-- MY *TIME* WAS ON ME.
I MIXED MY *BLOOD* WITH THE MORTAR. FOR STRENGTH. FOR A *BLESSING.*
AND NOW-- NOW MY TIME IS ON ME *AGAIN.*
BLOOD CALLS TO *BLOOD.*

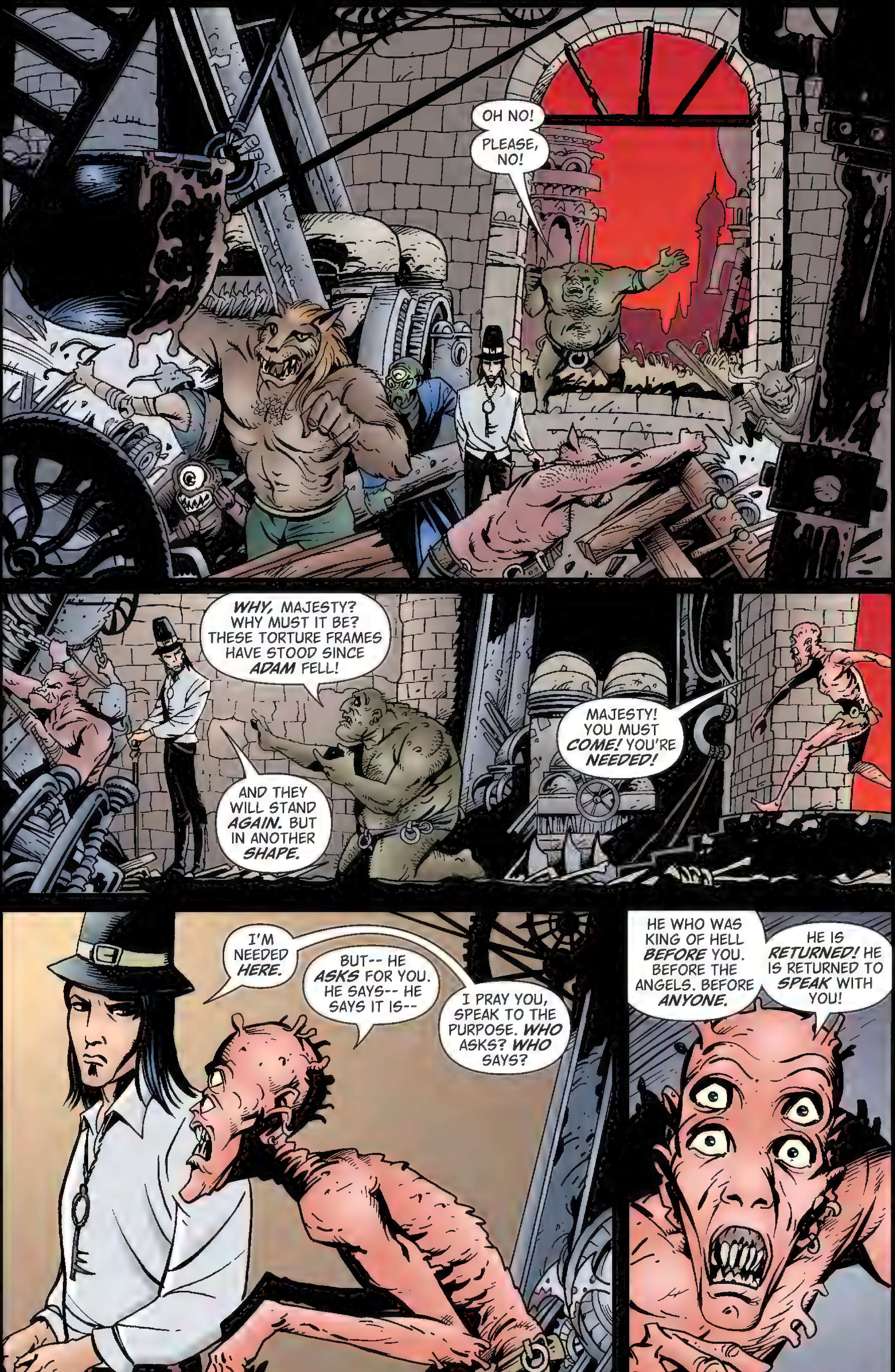
YOU'RE SQUIRMING LIKE A FISH ON A *HOOK,* LUCIFER.
THE WORLDS ARE *ENDING.*
AND YOU'RE NEITHER THE *INCUMBENT* NOR THE *CHALLENGER.*
YOU'RE JUST *WATCHING,* FROM THE SIDELINES.
EVEN IF I *WANTED* TO GET INVOLVED, THERE'S A RIGHT *TIME.*
UNTIL *THAT* COMES, WATCHING HAS ITS USES.
THE TIME IS *NOW.* THE PLACE IS SOMEWHERE *ELSE.*
BECAUSE I *UNDERSTAND* THE TIDES THAT WASH ACROSS THIS MOMENT, AND YOU *DON'T.*
EASILY *SAID,* LITTLE GIRL.
THE BASANOS WAS ALWAYS FOND OF ITS OWN *RHETORIC,* TOO.
I'LL TAKE YOU THERE, THEN.
BUT I'M *STILL* YOUR ENEMY, LUCIFER. I PROMISE I'LL DO YOU NO FAVORS. IN FACT --
-- I'LL BRING YOU TO YOUR ENDING.

LADY--
PLEASE!
DON'T
DO THIS.
TOO *LATE,*
ANGEL. A MILLION,
MILLION *YEARS*
TOO LATE.
THE TIME
FOR *MERCY*
PASSED.
ANOTHER
TIME WAS
BORN--
--AND THAT IS
WHERE WE HAVE
TO *LIVE.*

THE *CITY!*
ZONAQUEL, THE CITY IS--
KILL THEM, MISRAN.
AND THEN *TAKE* THE CITY.

SO.
HERE IT BEGAN.
HERE IT ENDS.
HOME AGAIN, HOME AGAIN, MORNINGSTAR.
JIGGITY JIG.

CHRISTOPHER RUDD:
IT HAS BEEN *HARD.*
IT *CONTINUES* TO BE HARD.
THE ENTIRE *ECONOMY* OF HELL HAS BEEN BENT TO ONE END: THE INFLICTING OF *PAIN.*
STAND *ASIDE,* BROTHER.
M-MAJESTY! I *CANNOT!*
AND THAT END IS NOW *IRRELEVANT.*
TO CHANGE *MAPS* IS EASY, BUT TO CHANGE *MINDS--*
THE ENGINES ARE IN *MY* CHARGE! THEY MUST NOT BE *TOUCHED!*
AH, THAT IS A *TRICKSOME* MATTER.
THIS WAS A *LOOM* THAT WOVE THE LIMBS OF THE *DAMNED?*
AYE, MAJESTY.
AND THERE MUST BE-- WHAT WOULD *YOU* SAY, DRUMSKOR-- A *TON* OF IRON IN IT?
DISMANTLE THEM. *ALL* OF THEM.
AND MELT THEM *DOWN.*


OH NO!
PLEASE, NO!
WHY, MAJESTY? WHY MUST IT BE? THESE TORTURE FRAMES HAVE STOOD SINCE ADAM FELL!
AND THEY WILL STAND AGAIN. BUT IN ANOTHER SHAPE.
MAJESTY! YOU MUST COME! YOU'RE NEEDED!
I'M NEEDED HERE.
BUT-- HE ASKS FOR YOU. HE SAYS-- HE SAYS IT IS--
I PRAY YOU, SPEAK TO THE PURPOSE. WHO ASKS? WHO SAYS?
HE WHO WAS KING OF HELL BEFORE YOU. BEFORE THE ANGELS. BEFORE ANYONE.
HE IS RETURNED! HE IS RETURNED TO SPEAK WITH YOU!

MORNINGSTAR

PART 2 OF 6

MIKE CAREY writer • PETER GROSS & RYAN KELLY artists
JARED K. FLETCHER lettering • DANIEL VOZZO colors
MICHAEL Wm. KALUTA cover painter • MARIAH HUEHNER editor

Based of characters created by
GAIMAN, KIETH, & DRINGENBERG

"LORD *LUCIFER!*"
"LORD *LUCIFER* IS HERE!"
UH...DO THESE GUYS *KNOW* YOU?
THIS IS HELL. *EVERYBODY* KNOWS HIM.
I THINK I'LL WAIT IN THE *CAR.*

LIGHTBRINGER!
MASTER RUDD.
WE ARE AWAY FROM *HOME*, THESE TIMES, BUT WHAT HOSPITALITY WE CAN *OFFER* IS YOURS BY RIGHT.
YOU'VE DONE *WELL* FOR YOURSELF DOWN HERE.
THANKS TO *YOU*, YES. YOUR DUEL WITH *AMENADIEL* SHOWED EVERYONE THAT HELL COULD CHANGE, AND MADE THEM *HUNGRY* FOR IT.
BUT WHAT'S YOUR *PURPOSE* HERE NOW?
THAT'S A GOOD *QUESTION*. ANY HINTS, NOEMA?
WHAT *ARE* WE DOING HERE?
ENACTING YOUR *DESTINIES*.
THIS IS THE *CRUX*, SO IT WAS HARD FOR ME TO *RESIST*. THIS IS WHERE YOU MAKE YOUR *CHOICES*, SEVERALLY AND SEPARATELY.
THIS IS WHERE YOU'RE *LAUNCHED* ON YOUR FINAL TRAJECTORIES-- TO *FALL* ELSEWHERE.
THAT'S ALL I *HAVE*, AT THE MOMENT. AND IT MEANS AS MUCH TO *YOU* AS IT DOES TO ME.
I-- SEE.
WELL IN ANY EVENT, YOU'RE *WELCOME*. YOU AND THESE *OTHERS*.
BUT WE'VE ONE *FURTHER* CALL TO MAKE BEFORE WE RETURN TO THE PALACE OF THE *ANGELS*.

"I TRUST THERE'S NO PRESSING *BUSINESS* THAT AWAITS YOU *ELSEWHERE.*"
WILL *YOU* CALL THE CHARGE, LILITH, OR SHOULD *I?*
BUT WE GIVE THEM TIME TO *REGROUP.* TO ARM, AND MAKE A--
NOT *YET.*
I SAID NOT YET, SANDALPHON. I *MEANT* IT.

DO YOU *RECOGNIZE* THEM?
THE ONE IN FRONT IS *URIEL*-- THE FIRST IN HEAVEN, NOW THAT MICHAEL IS *DEAD*.
THE OTHERS ARE *GENERALS* OF THE THRONES AND DOMINIONS.
NOW SOUND THE CHARGE.

THANK YOU.
YOU MAY LEAVE ME *ALONE* WITH THE LADY.
AYE, MAJESTY.
LADY *LYS.*
MASTER RUDD. MESSIRE LE *MARQUIS.* YOUR *MAJESTY.*
I PRAY YOU *PARDON* ME. WHAT TITLE *DO* YOU GO BY THESE DAYS?
CHRISTOPHER WILL DO WELL ENOUGH.
LADY, I CAN SEE THAT THIS *CONFINEMENT* HURTS YOUR HEALTH. I WOULD BE *RECONCILED* WITH YOU.
YOU TRIED TO RAISE A *REBELLION* AGAINST ME.
AH.
AND HOW DO YOU THINK THIS *MIRACLE* MIGHT BE ACHIEVED?
TRIED, YES. BUT *FAILED.*
HELL HAS NOT THE *COURAGE* NOW TO KNOW ITSELF.

PROMISE ME THAT YOU'LL ATTEMPT NO *FURTHER* HARM, AND I'LL GIVE YOU YOUR *FREEDOM.*
ONLY *PROMISE?*
THAT'S ALL. I'LL *TRUST* YOUR WORD.
TRUST IT *NOT.* I'LL GIVE IT AND THEN *BREAK* IT.
AND I'LL FIGHT YOU UNTIL MY BLOOD IS *DUST.*
YOU SEE-- I FEEL *PERSONALLY* RESPONSIBLE FOR YOU. IT WAS I, MORE THAN ANY OTHER, WHO *ALLOWED* YOU TO HAPPEN.
LYS, MY FEELINGS FOR *YOU* ARE EQUALLY--
SPARE ME. *NOTHING* IS PERSONAL FOR YOU. NOT EVEN *TREACHERY.*
YOU BETRAYED ME. BUT THEN YOU BETRAY *EVERYONE,* WITH THE SAME FREE HAND.
I WONDER AT WHAT *POINT* IT WAS, CHRISTOPHER, THAT YOU BETRAYED *YOURSELF.*

THEY *ATTACK!* THEY HAVE *IGNORED* OUR FLAG OF TRUCE!
AND URIEL IS *DOWN.*
OH, THEY WILL BURN *FOREVER* FOR THIS.
WE MUST USE WHAT ADVANTAGE WE *HAVE.*
ATTACK THEM FROM THE *AIR,* AND RAIN GOD'S *VENGEANCE* DOWN UPON THEM.

OH GOD.
OH GOD.

WE RODE IN STATE ACROSS THE FIELDS OF HELL.
AND WHEREVER WE WENT, NEWS OF OUR COMING PRECEDED US.
NEWS OF HIS COMING, I SHOULD SAY.
THE WISHED-FOR WORD THAT THE DEVIL HAD COME HOME AT LAST.
I HAVE A PLAN. AN AMBITION BEYOND THE LIBERATION OF HELL.
that's OBVIOUS. you're going to attack the SILVER city.
and bring the host of heaven to heel.
EXACTLY! ANY GOD WHO CONDONES ETERNAL SUFFERING IS A TYRANT.
I FIGHT FOR JUSTICE. JUSTICE IN AETERNUM.
BUT YOU CAN'T WIN! NOT AGAINST THE HOST!
with yahweh gone, I think he could.
but there's more at stake than you might think, rudd. and your timing couldn't be worse.
AND HE TOLD ME ABOUT YGGDRASIL, AND THE UNRAVELING OF THE WORLDS.
WHILE THE LEAGUES FELL AWAY BENEATH OUR TURNING WHEELS--

--UNTIL AT LAST WE CAME IN SIGHT OF *HOME*.
DUMA! I'VE *MISSED* YOUR WISE COUNSEL. LOOK-- I RETURN IN *COMPANY*.
AND *EXALTED* COMPANY, AT THAT.
ANOTHER VISITOR?
WHERE?
YES, I SEE. I *SEE*.
SLEEVE NOTES?
HE'S *DUMA*. ONE OF THE ANGELS WHO USED TO BE IN *CHARGE* HERE.
HE GAVE HELL'S *KEY* TO THIS MAN, RUDD. I DON'T KNOW *WHY*.
I DO.
LORD LUCIFER, IT'S *GOOD* THAT WE ARRIVED WHEN WE DID. SOMEONE *ELSE* HAS COME HERE, LOOKING FOR *YOU*.
PLEASE, FOLLOW ME. I THINK THIS IS A *REUNION* YOU WON'T WANT TO *DELAY*.

MAZIKEEN.
MY LORD!
NO. NO OBEISANCES. NOT FROM YOU.
I'M GLAD THE RUMORS OF YOUR DEATH WERE EXAGGERATED.
BUT HOW DID YOU FIND ME HERE?
I'LL ALWAYS FIND YOU, LORD. I HAVE A SENSE FOR YOU.
I BRING NEWS. NEWS THAT WAS HARD WON.
THE SILVER CITY IS BESIEGED. BY MY MOTHER, LILITH, AND BY A NEW HOST SHE SPAWNED WITH THE ANGEL SANDALPHON.
THEY HOPE TO SMASH THE THRONE OF PRIMUM MOBILE AND LAY WASTE TO HEAVEN.
A NEW HOST? WHERE DID YOU HEAR THIS?
FROM A SOURCE THAT CAN'T BE GAINSAID.
BERIM OF THE JIN EN MOK.
IT'S TRUE. EVERY WORD OF IT.
AND I ONLY TELL YOU NOW BECAUSE YOU'RE TOO LATE TO PREVENT IT.

"WHILE YOU STAND HERE, DUMBLY AMAZED--"
"--HEAVEN FALLS."
URIEL! YOU LIVE!
FOR THE TIME BEING.
BUT THIS BATTLE IS LOST.

WE MUST FALL BACK ON *PRIMUM MOBILE,* AND DEFEND IT.
CALL A *RETREAT,* ACHIRIEL. NOW.
BUT WHERE ARE *YOU* GOING?
I'LL DRAW OFF SOME OF THEIR *STRENGTH.*
DO AS I *SAY.* THERE'S NO *TIME* TO BE LOST.

RUDD, A MISSTEP HERE WILL TOPPLE US ALL INTO RUIN.
I'M ASKING YOU TO RECONSIDER.
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE ASKING, MORNINGSTAR.
WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND IS WHY.
I TOLD YOU ABOUT THE BLOOD THAT WAS SHED AT YGGDRASIL-- AND ABOUT YAHWEH'S ABDICATION.
AYE, BUT--
THE ONE CURSE FEEDS ON THE OTHER. EVERYTHING, EVEN THE HUMAN SOUL, IS DISSOLVING INTO ITS COMPONENT PARTS-- AND THE WORLDS WILL NOT ENDURE.
MY OWN CREATION, AND THIS ONE-- BOTH STAND ON THE BRINK OF DISSOLUTION.
IF ANYTHING AT ALL CAN BE SALVAGED, IT DEPENDS ON PRIMUM MOBILE REMAINING INTACT.
YOU WOULD HAVE ME COMMIT THE FORCES OF HELL TO FIGHT ON HEAVEN'S BEHALF.
EXACTLY. YOU CAN SWING THE BALANCE.
OTHERWISE BERIM IS RIGHT. EVERYTHING WILL BLEED AND BOIL AWAY INTO THE VOID.

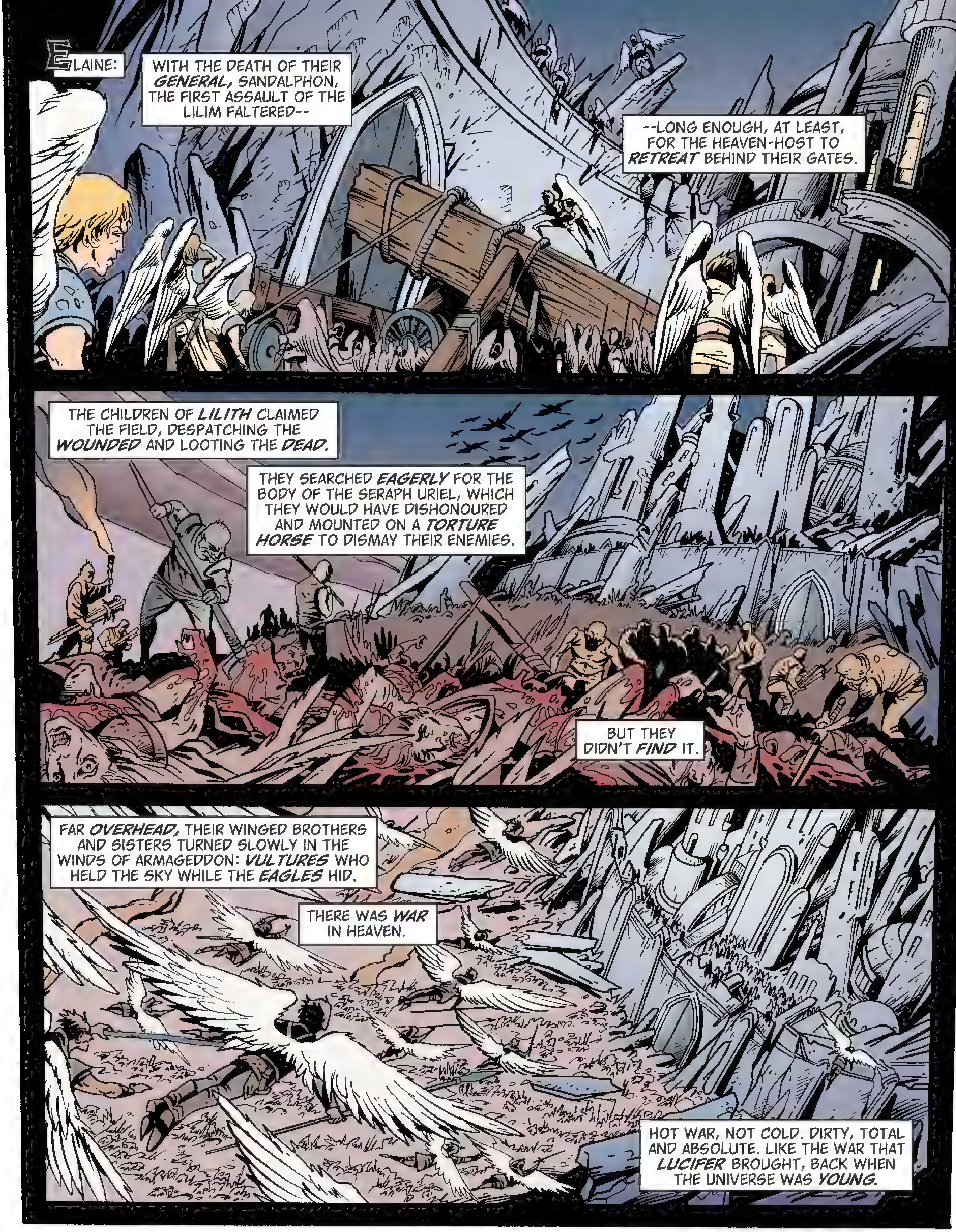
YES. THAT'S WHAT I *SEE.* A GREAT *DYING,* AND THEN A GREAT SILENCE AND STILLNESS.
WHICH NEVER *ENDS.*
SUCCINCTLY PUT. *EVERYTHING* DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU DO NEXT.
IF YOU OPPOSE ME, WHAT I DO IS *MEANINGLESS,* IN ANY CASE.
THAT'S NOT TRUE. THE KEY CAN'T BE TAKEN BY FORCE--ONLY GIVEN.
ATTACK HEAVEN, AS YOU *INTEND* TO DO, AND YOU END NOT JUST YAHWEH'S *REIGN* BUT HIS CREATION.
FIGHT ON HEAVEN'S *SIDE,* AND YOU LEAVE ME A WINDOW TO *WORK* IN.
SO YOU ASK ME TO *REVERSE* ALL MY PLANS, ON THE EVIDENCE OF A-- A SEVERED *HEAD?*
YES. THAT'S WHAT I'M *ASKING.*
IT'S TOO MUCH, LUCIFER. TOO *MUCH.* I NEED *BETTER* REASONS.
I DON'T *HAVE* ANY.
IT HAS TO BE *YOUR* CHOICE.

"and it has to be quick."
IT GOES WELL FOR US, LILITH.
BUT THE ANGELS SHOULDN'T BE ALLOWED TO RETREAT.
CUT THEM OFF FROM THE GATE, SANDALPHON.
TO ME, MY CHILDREN!
AND THE DEVIL TAKE--
GUUUH!

MAY YOUR LIFE BE *FORGOTTEN,* APOSTATE, AND YOUR DEEDS *RUST* UNSUNG.
NOW *YOU,* LADY.
ALL *CREATION* WOULD HAVE PROSPERED IF IBRIEL HAD SNAPPED YOUR *NECK* THE DAY HE MET YOU.
BUT WHAT *HE* LEFT UNFINISHED--
I HERE *CONCLUDE.*
GUARD YOUR *BACK,* ANGEL.
IT SEEMS *EXPOSED.*

BERIM! I'M GLAD TO *SEE* YOU.
BUT WHY DID YOU SPEND SO *LONG* ON SUCH A SIMPLE--
YOU MISTAKE ME FOR ANOTHER, LADY. I AM FENRIS, THE WOLF.
AND I CAME AS SOON AS I SMELLED THE *BLOOD*.

I AM NOT A *GOOD* MAN.
NOR A *BRAVE* ONE.
IN TRUTH, I WAS SENT TO HELL FOR A *REASON.*
AND I CANNOT SAY IT WAS *EXCESSIVE,* OR *UNJUST.*
I *KILLED* AN INNOCENT. A *CHILD* WHO LOVED ME AND TRUSTED ME.
TO SPITE A *WOMAN* WHO COULD NO LONGER DO *EITHER.*
AND THE SINS THAT I HAVE *ADDED* TO MY TALLY, SINCE I *CAME* TO THIS PLACE!
THE *BETRAYALS.* THE *LIES.* THE *MURDERS.*
OH GOD, WHERE IS MY *RIGHTEOUSNESS?* WHERE IS MY *REDEMPTION?*
AND WHAT SHALL I *DO,* NOW?
WHAT SHALL I *DO?*


ELAINE:
WITH THE DEATH OF THEIR *GENERAL,* SANDALPHON, THE FIRST ASSAULT OF THE LILIM FALTERED--
--LONG ENOUGH, AT LEAST, FOR THE HEAVEN-HOST TO *RETREAT* BEHIND THEIR GATES.
THE CHILDREN OF *LILITH* CLAIMED THE FIELD, DESPATCHING THE *WOUNDED* AND LOOTING THE *DEAD.*
THEY SEARCHED *EAGERLY* FOR THE BODY OF THE SERAPH URIEL, WHICH THEY WOULD HAVE DISHONOURED AND MOUNTED ON A *TORTURE HORSE* TO DISMAY THEIR ENEMIES.
BUT THEY DIDN'T *FIND* IT.
FAR *OVERHEAD,* THEIR WINGED BROTHERS AND SISTERS TURNED SLOWLY IN THE WINDS OF ARMAGEDDON: *VULTURES* WHO HELD THE SKY WHILE THE *EAGLES* HID.
THERE WAS *WAR* IN HEAVEN.
HOT WAR, NOT COLD. DIRTY, TOTAL AND ABSOLUTE. LIKE THE WAR THAT *LUCIFER* BROUGHT, BACK WHEN THE UNIVERSE WAS *YOUNG.*

MORNINGSTAR

PART 3 OF 6

MIKE CAREY writer • PETER GROSS & RYAN KELLY artists
JARED K. FLETCHER lettering • DANIEL VOZZO colors
MICHAEL Wm. KALUTA cover painter • MARIAH HUEHNER editor
Based on characters created by GAIMAN, KIETH, & DRINGENBERG

BUT LUCIFER WAS SITTING *THIS* ONE OUT.
A *SUPPLICANT* AT THE COURT OF HELL'S NEW *KING.*
I THOUGHT I KNEW *ALL* HIS MOODS BY THIS TIME. ALL HIS *SEASONS.*
BUT I WAS *WRONG.*
I'D NEVER SEEN HIM *WAIT.*
THAT'S *BEAUTIFUL.*
YOU CAN'T EVEN *SEE* IT.
I'M LEARNING TO SEE IN *OTHER* WAYS.
THEN I *BOW* TO YOUR AESTHETIC SENSIBILITIES, ELAINE BELLOC.
"THE HOST DO NOT *BUILD.* THEY ONLY *MAINTAIN* WHAT HAS BEEN BUILT."
MY *BROTHER,* GABRIEL. ONE OF THE *LONGEST* SPEECHES I EVER HEARD HIM MAKE.
YOU'VE NEVER LISTENED TO *ANYONE* WHO TOLD YOU WHAT YOU COULDN'T DO.
I DON'T REALLY THINK YOU'RE ABOUT TO START *NOW.*

IF RUDD *AGREES* TO HELP US-- WILL THE OUTCOME BE *CHANGED?*
CAN THE HELL-KIN *SAVE* HEAVEN?
NO. BUT THEY CAN *NEUTRALIZE* THE LILIM. BUY *YOU* THE TIME TO DO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE.
BUY *ME* TIME? YOU MEAN *YOURSELF,* LUCIFER.
THERE ISN'T ANYTHING THAT *I* CAN DO.
YOU CREATED A *COSMOS.* THAT PUTS YOU IN A SOMEWHAT *EXCLUSIVE* CLUB.
BUT IT'S NOT A--
--A MATTER OF *POWER* ALONE? I KNOW THAT BETTER THAN *ANYONE.*
SINCE THIS HAS TURNED INTO THE FINAL *CONFLICT* BETWEEN SOMETHING AND NOTHING, I'M SIDING WITH *SOMETHING.*
BUT ONLY SO FAR AS IT *SUITS* ME. I WON'T LET MYSELF BE *IMPRISONED* IN A SITUATION I DIDN'T CHOOSE.
SO IS THAT *MY* PART? TO BE *IMPRISONED?*
ASSUMING WE SURVIVE AT *ALL,* YES.
BUT THE LONGER RUDD *DELAYS,* THE MORE *ACADEMIC* THE WHOLE ISSUE BECOMES.
WE MAY *LOSE* WITHOUT EVEN FIGHTING.
THAT WOULD BE A NEW *EXPERIENCE* FOR ME.

THESE ARE THE TALLEST TOWERS IN THE CITY, SO LOGICALLY--
--*ONE* OF THEM MUST HOUSE THE THRONE.
ACTUALLY, LILITH, THE THRONE IS *INFINITE,* LIKE LUCIFER'S GATE.
ONLY *PART* OF IT EXTRUDES INTO CREATION.
IT WILL BE HARD TO DESTROY THEN.
ALL OF THOSE TOWERS ARE IN THE VERY *HEART* OF THE CITY, FENRIS. THEY WILL BE *FIERCELY* DEFENDED. THIS CAN *WAIT* UNTIL THE CITY FALLS.
I HAVE CERTAIN *SKILLS* IN THAT REGARD.
CAN WAIT? POSSIBLY. BUT IT *WON'T.*
THE *THRONE* IS OUR TARGET. THE *REST* OF THE CITY IS MERE-- ORNAMENT.
SO SAY *YOU.* BUT WHO *ARE* YOU?
A GOD FROM A *FORGOTTEN* PANTHEON. AN ACCIDENTAL *SURVIVAL.*
MISRAN--

THE *AESIR* MAY HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN. THERE IS A REASON WHY *FENRIS* HAS NOT.
I FEAR YOU *NOT*, WOLF.
IT IS THE *LILIM* WHO FIGHT HERE. IT IS THE LILIM WHO WILL DECIDE *STRATEGY*.
AND WHO *SPEAKS* FOR THE LILIM, MISRAN?
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN *THAT?*
MOTHER-- I *APOLOGIZE*.
ACCEPTED. FENRIS, THAT SHAPE IS NOT APPROPRIATE FOR THIS TABLE.
THEN I WILL NOT *USE* IT HERE AGAIN.
WE'LL BOMBARD THE *WALLS* FOR TWO TURNS OF THE *GLASS*.
LET THEM WEAR THEMSELVES *OUT* WITH REPAIRING BREACHES, AND LET THE *DESTRUCTION* SAP THEIR SPIRITS.
THEN WE'LL ATTACK AGAIN.
STRIKING AT THE *HEART*-- AT PRIMUM MOBILE-- SO THAT THE *LIMBS* MAY FAIL.
I HAVE *SPOKEN*, AND YOU ARE *DISMISSED*.
SON OF *LILITH*.
WOLF?

YOU ASKED ME WHAT I *AM.*
DO YOU *REALLY* WISH TO KNOW, OR WAS THE QUESTION *RHETORICAL?*
IF YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO *SAY,* OR TO *SHOW* ME, THEN BY ALL MEANS--
AAAAAH!
HHK HHK
I AM *DESTRUCTION.*
REMEMBER IT.

"MOTHER.
"LET ME MAKE YOU *HAPPY*."
I'M *FINE*, NOEMA.
NO YOU'RE *NOT*. YOU'RE SAD AND AFRAID. BUT I CAN TAKE *AWAY* YOUR FEAR.
JUST-- *DON'T*, OKAY? DON'T DO *ANYTHING* TO ME.
YEAH, I *AM* PRETTY MISERABLE. AND TENSE. AND PISSING-MY-PANTS *SCARED*.
AND MAD AS *FUCK* THAT IN THE WHOLE OF HELL THERE ISN'T AN ISSUE OF *VARIETY* MORE RECENT THAN OCTOBER 1963.
BUT THOSE ARE *MY* EMOTIONS. I WANT TO FEEL THE WAY I *FEEL*.
YOU *WANT* TO BE UNHAPPY?
YEAH. EXACTLY.
WHY?
BECAUSE THE *WORLD* IS ENDING. SOMEONE-- SOMEONE HAS TO *CRY* OVER THAT.
AND NOBODY *ELSE* AROUND HERE SEEMS PARTICULARLY *BOTHERED*.
I'M SORRY. I THOUGHT YOU UNDERSTOOD THIS.
I *BROUGHT* US TO HELL SO THE WORLD WOULD NOT END.

WHAT? YOU MEAN THERE'S STILL A *CHANCE* THIS WILL COME OUT *OKAY?*
OH YES. I SAW *MANY* FUTURES WHERE CREATION *SURVIVES.*
BUT IT WAS HARD TO FIND THE *RIGHT* ONE.
I WANTED THERE TO BE A STRONG *POSSIBILITY* THAT THE REALMS OF LIGHT AND THE SOULS OF MEN WOULD BE *SAVED.*
BUT A GOOD CHANCE, ALSO, THAT *LUCIFER* WOULD DIE IN SAVING THEM.
I THOUGHT YOU *FORGAVE--*
I FORGAVE *YOU.* NOT THE *LIGHTBRINGER.*
THEN-- IS THAT WHERE WE *ARE?* IS THAT WHAT'S GOING TO *HAPPEN?*
HE TALKS ABOUT HIS *ENEMIES.* HE TALKS ABOUT *FIRE* AND *SNOW.*
AND *SHE* SAYS "LET'S BURN."
SO FAR IT ALL SEEMS TO BE WORKING OUT *EXACTLY* RIGHT.

I TELL YOU I CANNOT!
I CANNOT ANSWER YOU!
DELAYING YOUR DECISION IS A DECISION IN ITSELF, RUDD.
ALL YOUR MORAL ANGUISH WILL SOON BECOME IRRELEVANT.
YOU ASK TOO MUCH. AND I HAVE TO TAKE EVERYTHING ON TRUST-- ON YOUR UNSUPPORTED WORD!
I NEVER SAID THAT HE LIED, DUMA. ONLY THAT--
WHAT? OF COURSE I BELIEVE THAT HEAVEN IS ATTACKED. THAT'S NOT THE ISSUE.
YOU KNOW WHAT I SEEK, MORNINGSTAR. WHY I QUARREL WITH MY CREATOR.
YES. I KNOW.
HE HAS ABANDONED THE DAMNED TO THEIR SUFFERING. WASHED HIS HANDS OF US.
HE'S ABANDONED EVERYONE NOW.
YOU'RE NOT SPECIAL.

I WANT JUSTICE. I WANT A SYSTEM THAT USES NO MAN'S SOUL AS CURRENCY.
CURRENCY? THE MARKET'S IN FREEFALL.
WELL, ENOUGH. THANK YOU FOR YOUR HOSPITALITY, RUDD.
BUT-- MY DECISION--
--DOESN'T AFFECT MINE. I FOUGHT A WAR IN HEAVEN ONCE BEFORE.
I'M GOING TO OFFER MY OLD ENEMIES THE BENEFIT OF MY EXPERIENCE.
NOEMA SAID YOUR POWER IS LEAKING AWAY.
THE LILIM COULD KILL YOU.
THEY'RE WELCOME TO TRY.
IF WE WAIT HERE, DEATH WILL SIFT OVER US LIKE SNOW AND NUMB US TO SLEEP.
ON THE WHOLE, FIRE IS STILL MY ELEMENT.
THEN LET'S BURN.
I SUPPOSE.

I TRIED TO SOUND *DECISIVE,* BUT MY THOUGHTS WERE ALL *OVER* THE PLACE.
I WAS *AFRAID* OF WHAT WE WERE GOING TO DO. AFRAID THAT WE MIGHT *FAIL.*
AFRAID OF WHAT LUCIFER SAID ABOUT MY FATE.
BUT MY FATHER GAVE ME A *GIFT,* BEFORE HE DIED. THE GIFT OF *FIRE.*
THE FIRE OF THE *FORGE,* WHICH CREATES.
THE FIRE OF THE *TORCH,* WHICH LAYS WASTE AND DESTROYS.
ALL I WAS DOING WAS BRINGING THEM *HOME.*

ARMAGEDDON PLAIN.
ARCHERS, WATCH THE *TOWERS.* IF AN ANGEL SHOWS HIS FACE, GIVE HIM SOME FEATHERS IN HIS THROAT TO MATCH THE ONES IN HIS *WINGS.*
ADJUTANT, COUNT THE *LINE.*
LIONFIST-- GODSTONE-- BERSERKER-- SERPENT-- STORMTOOTH--
ALL *READY,* SIR!
FIRE AT *WILL.*
ALL *TRUE!* EVERY LAST LOAD, TRUE AS A *PLUMB LINE.* THE WALLS *FALL,* NAGRENE!
AYE. THEY *FALL.*
THEN WHY DO YOU BOW YOUR *HEAD?*
I REMEMBER WHEN WE *BUILT* THEM.
RELOAD.

THE SILVER CITY.
URIEL IS FALLEN. BUT WE REMEMBER HIM AS HE WAS WHEN HE LIVED.
THE VOICE OF OUR CONSCIENCE. THE FACE OF OUR COURAGE.
I BEAR WITNESS. I SAW HIM STAND AGAINST THE RECREANT, SANDALPHON, AND HUMBLE HIM.
I BEAR WITNESS. HE SAVED ME FROM DEATH WHEN THE LILIM WOULD HAVE RENT ME ASUNDER.
FAREWELL, BROTHER. IT WAS JOY TO KNOW YOU.
IT IS PAIN BEYOND BEARING TO LOSE YOU.

WHAT *IS* IT, NOMIEL?
THE *BOMBARDMENT.* IT'S STOPPED.
THEN THE *ATTACK* WILL COME PRESENTLY. LET'S GO TO *MEET* IT.
ARE YOU *AFRAID,* MY BROTHER?
A LITTLE, YES. ARE NOT *YOU,* ACHIRIEL?
LIFE IS TOO *PRECIOUS* A THING FOR ME TO LOSE IT *LIGHTLY.*
AYE, PRECIOUS INDEED. BUT BE *CONSOLED,* NONETHELESS.
THIS IS *WHY* HE GAVE IT TO US.

ARE WE *READY?*
WE ARE *MORE* THAN READY, MOTHER.
YOUR WORD WILL GIVE US *WINGS.*
WHAT IS *THIS?*
YOUR-- YOUR *MOUNT.*
FOR THE *CHARGE.*
KEEP IT.
I'M NOT *HUNGRY.*
LILIM, KEEP *RANKS,* AND SOUND THE *ADVANCE.*
REMEMBER, EACH OF YOU, THE *GARDEN* THAT WAS DENIED, THE *CITY* THAT WAS STOLEN.
AND REMEMBER THAT THERE IS A *NAME* FOR THIS DAY.
THE *RECKONING!*

LUCIFER WAS RIGHT ABOUT HOW TIGHT THE TIME WAS.
THE SILVER CITY SEEMED READY TO FALL. IT WAS A MIRACLE IT HADN'T BEEN OVERWHELMED ALREADY.
SO THE BATTLE WAS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.
A FORTRESS WITH SO MANY HOLES IN IT COULDN'T POSSIBLY STAND.
UNLESS IT HAD SOME OTHER BULWARK TO DEFEND IT.

HOLD *HARD!*
HOLD HARD, FOR YOUR *LIVES!*
IT IS THE *LIGHTBRINGER!*

STAND, YOU DOGS! YOU COWARDS!
IS YOUR BLOOD-BRIGHT *COURAGE* PAINTED OVER *ROTTEN* WOOD?
WORDS WON'T HELP.
BUT PERHAPS *THIS* WILL.

THAT'S-- THAT'S *BLOOD!*
HE *BLEEDS!*
THE *MORNINGSTAR* IS WOUNDED!
THEN REDEEM YOUR *MANHOOD,* OFFAL! *WHELM* HIM!

FOR *LILITH!*
FOR *LILITH* AND THE *GARDEN!*
OH, LILITH'S SKIRTS AREN'T WIDE ENOUGH, BROTHERS.
NOT FOR ALL OF YOU TO HIDE BEHIND.
I'LL *BURY* YOU IN YOUR GODS-FUCKED GARDEN.

YES. I'VE DECIDED.
OPEN EVERY GATE, DUMA.
WE MARCH.

I LOOKED AT THE WORLD.
AND I SAW THAT IT WAS DOOMED.
AFTERWARD, I HAD TO REST A WHILE. OBLIGED AS I WAS TO RENEW MY WARDS AND SHIELDS AT LEAST ONCE IN EVERY HOUR--
--A SIMPLE REVEAL SPELL HAD ALL BUT EXHAUSTED ME.
WHEN I COULD AGAIN STAND ON MY OWN FEET, I WENT OUT FOR A WALK TO CLEAR MY HEAD.
IT WAS A SOBERING EXPERIENCE.
I SAW THAT THE MASS OF HUMANITY WERE NO LONGER ACTIVELY PURSUING DEATH AND DESTRUCTION. THEY HAD REACHED AN EVEN LOWER NADIR.
NOW THEY SIMPLY WAITED, DEVOID OF WILL, FOR DEATH TO COME AND CLAIM THEM.
WITH YAHWEH GONE, AND THE DIVINE NAME ERASED FROM CREATION, THE HUMAN SOUL WAS WINDING DOWN LIKE A CLOCK.
WAS CULVER HARLAND, THE GREATEST MAGICIAN OF THIS DEBASED AGE, TO END LIKE ONE OF THESE?
CLEARLY NOT. AND THEREFORE, SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE.
AFTER SOME SEARCHING, I LOCATED WHAT I NEEDED: A YOUNG MAN AND WOMAN OF UNTAINTED SPIRIT.

I DECIDED THAT THE *BATHROOM* WOULD BE THE BEST PLACE IN WHICH TO *SACRIFICE* THEM, AS THE FLOOR IS TILED--
--MAKING IT EASIER TO CLEAN UP THE INEVITABLE *MESS.*
THEN I PROCEEDED INTO MY *STUDY* FOR THE ACTUAL *CONJURATION.*
SUMMONING THE MOST POWERFUL *DEMON* IN HELL TO RISE THENCE AND *ATTEND* ME.
THE TORTURED AIR *SCREAMED.* A SMELL OF SULFUR AND ROTTING FLESH *SEARED* MY NOSTRILS.
A BLOOD-RED *LIGHT* FLOWERED AND FADED.
I STARED AT THE *FRUITS* OF MY LABORS--
--AND WONDERED WHETHER ANYONE HAD EVER ASKED THE DEVIL FOR HIS *MONEY* BACK.

The Beast Can't Take Your Call Right Now...

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WHAT *ARE* YOU, FIEND? SPEAK, I COMMAND YOU, YOUR *NAME* AND LINEAGE!
AND STAY WITHIN THE *CIRCLE* WHERE FIRST I SUMMONED YOU!
SABAOTH
THIS IS A CIRCLE? LOOKS KIND OF-- I DUNNO-- *ELLIPTICAL.*
AND "SABAOTH" JUST TAKES ONE B, DOESN'T IT?
HOW CAN *YOU* BE THE MOST POWERFUL DEMON IN *HELL?*
IS THAT WHAT YOU *ASKED* FOR?
OF COURSE! I WISH TO *BARGAIN* WITH THE GREAT INFERNAL POWERS!
HEH! OH, THAT'S--
HEH! YOU SAID--
YOU TRIED TO SUMMON--
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA HAHAHAHAHAHAHA
ENOUGH!

I'M SORRY. HEH! NO, THE THING IS, YOU REALLY DID GET WHAT YOU ASKED FOR. IN A SENSE.
IN *WHAT* SENSE?
IN THE SENSE THAT I'M CURRENTLY THE ONLY DEMON IN HELL.
WH--WHAT?
HOW CAN THAT *BE?*
TELL ME!
WELL, THE PLACE IS *EMPTY.* ALL THEM DEMON LORDS, THEY WENT *OFF* SOME PLACE.
SOME PLACE?
HEAVEN. LONG STORY. I, ER, I TAKE IT YOU HAD SOMETHING YOU WANTED TO *PITCH* TO THEM?
THE SALE AND *PURCHASE* OF MY IMMORTAL *SOUL.*
NO *SHIT?*
HEY, SOULS ARE MY *THING.* YOU GOT AN OFFER ALREADY?
I CAN *MATCH* IT.
PROBABLY. I JUST NEED TO *TALK* TO SOMEONE FIRST. STAY *THERE,* OKAY?
WHEREUPON THE FOUL CREATURE TOOK *WING* AND LEFT ME.
NO DOUBT TO *DISCUSS* MY FATE WITH ITS DEMONIC *SPONSORS--*

--IN SOME *NIGHTMARE* REALM MY HUMAN IMAGINATION COULD BARELY EVEN *COMPREHEND.*
GAUDIUM. PLEASE.
JUST LEAVE THAT THING *ALONE* BEFORE IT *KILLS* YOU.
CITELLA CAFE
LOOK, SPERA, ITALIAN *WAITERS* WORK THIS FUCKING MACHINE.
HOW HARD CAN IT *BE?*
DON'T SET ME UP WITH *STRAIGHT LINES.* JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU WANTED TO *TALK* ABOUT.
CITELLA CAFE
UM-- WELL-- SOME GUY IS GONNA SELL ME HIS *SOUL.*
I WONDERED IF YOU WANTED A *PIECE* OF THE DEAL.
IS HE CLINICALLY *INSANE?*
NO.
ARE *YOU?*
NO!
THEN WHY ARE WE EVEN *HAVING* THIS CONVERSATION?
THINK, BROTHER. YOU SAID IT *YOURSELF*-- HELL IS *EMPTY.*
NOBODY-- BUT *NOBODY*-- IS TRADING IN *SOULS* ANYMORE.

WELL, THAT'S MY *POINT, SIS.*
I FIGURE WHEN ALL THIS SHIT GETS SORTED *OUT,* I'LL BE ONE SOUL AHEAD OF THE *OPPOSITION.*
ANYWAY, WHAT CONCEIVABLE *DEAL* CAN YOU CUT FOR THIS GUY?
YOU CAN'T GRANT HIS *WISHES.*
TRUE. BUT REMEMBER THE *LAST* TIME WE WERE HERE?
"WE'D JUST COME BACK FROM THE REALMS OF *PAIN,* AND THAT CUTE *WAITRESS* WAS MAKING EYES AT ME."
"SHE WAS JUST WONDERING WHAT *DRUG* SHE WAS HAVING *FLASHBACKS* FROM."
"LOOK, DON'T *INTERRUPT* ME, OKAY?"
"ANYWAY, I WANTED TO LEAVE HER A GOOD *TIP.* BUT I DIDN'T HAVE ANY *CASH.*"
"SO I-- Y'KNOW-- GAVE HER WHAT I *HAD.*"
THE MUMMIFIED BODY OF THE GODDESS *ERITI!*
BINGO.
WHICH GRANTS *WISHES!*
BINGISSIMO.
I OPEN MY MOUTH TO *SPEAK.* NOTHING COMES *OUT.*
THIS COULD *EASILY* BE THE BIGGEST SCREW-UP IN A *LEGENDARY* CAREER.
I'D HATE TO *MISS* IT. I'M *IN.*

SHE LIVES OVER IN *WILLESDEN.*
HOW DO *YOU* KNOW WHERE SHE LIVES?
WELL, I *MAY* OR *MAY* NOT HAVE FOLLOWED HER ONE NIGHT AND THEN...
I DIDN'T *GET* THAT.
OKAY, I THINK THIS WAS THE--
...
YOU STAY *HERE.*
WHY?
IT'S NOT *NICE* IN THERE.
YOU'RE *PROTECTING* ME?
NO. I'D JUST *PREFER* IT.
OKAY, I *GOT* IT.
ANY *TROUBLE?*
NO. NO TROUBLE.
FUCK IT.
GOT SOMETHING IN MY FUCKING *EYE.*
"SOMETHING IN YOUR *EYE*"?
ALLERGIC REACTION, MOST LIKELY.
TO *WHAT?*
BEGINS WITH "S." FIVE LETTERS. IT'LL COME TO YOU.

AS I AWAITED THE DEMON'S RETURN, I BUSIED MYSELF WITH MY OWN AFFAIRS.
PONDERING THE WHILE ON WHAT IT HAD TOLD ME ABOUT HELL-- AND THE OPPORTUNITY IT MIGHT PRESENT.
OKAY, GAME ON.
UM-- THIS IS SPERA. SHE'S MY LEGAL ADVISER.
EXCELLENT. THEN LET US COME TO TERMS.
WELL, I WAS THINKING WE'D JUST GO WITH THE STANDARD DEAL.
WHICH IS?
THREE WISHES IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL.
I CONSENT.
BUT NO WISHING FOR MORE WISHES, OR FOR TIME TO STAND STILL OR SHIT LIKE THAT.
I'M HOLDING THE MAGIC MUMMY HERE. YOU PLAY NICE OR THE DEAL'S OFF.
EMINENTLY SENSIBLE. AGAIN, I CONSENT.
SHALL WE MAKE A START?

FIRST OF ALL, I ASK TO BE **RESTORED** TO FULL YOUTH AND VIGOR.
YEAH?
AND TO THE PERFECT **FLOWER** OF HEALTH.
YOU **HEARD** THE MAN, ERITI.
MAKE IT SO.
AAAAAH!!
WOW. QUICK WORK.
EH, I GUESS.
WONDERFUL!
TRULY **WONDERFUL!**

AND FOR MY *SECOND* WISH-- I SHOULD LIKE TO *SEE* THIS PRODIGY YOU DESCRIBED TO ME.
THE REALM OF HELL, *EMPTIED* OF ITS INFERNAL HOST.
YOU WOULD? WELL, IT'S *YOUR* DIME.
OKAY, GODDESS, DO YOUR *STUFF.*
TAKE US TO-- OH, THAT TACKY *TOWER* THAT THE ANGELS BUILT. UP ON THE *ROOF* SOMEWHERE.
THERE. SEE?
EMPTY.

THIS-- THIS QUICKENS THE HEART AND DAZZLES THE EYES.
HOW ABOUT YOUR NOSE?
HAS THAT KICKED IN YET?
I WANT TO BE THE LORD OF THIS REALM.
SAY WHAT?
TO HAVE DOMINION OVER IT FOR AS LONG AS I SHALL LIVE.
ARE YOU SEEING STRAIGHT? THIS PLACE IS CLOSED FOR BUSINESS.
HOBOKEN HAS CLEANER AIR AND BETTER NIGHT LIFE.
IT IS MY THIRD AND FINAL WISH.
FINE. YOU'RE THE BOSS.
MAKE ME LORD OVER HELL, AND OVER THE DENIZENS OF HELL, IN THEIR SEVERAL RANKS AND DEGREES.
ERITI, MAKE HIM LORD OVER HELL, AND OVER ALL THE DENIZENS OF HELL, IN THEIR--
GAUDIUM! NO!
--SEVERAL RANKS AND-- AND--
OH, FUCK-A-DOODLE-DO.
IDIOT!
NOW GIVE ME THE MUMMY.
AND KNEEL BEFORE YOUR NEW LORD.

DON'T SAY A WORD.
"ALL THE DENIZENS OF HELL"? WHO DID YOU THINK THAT MEANT?
OKAY, PICK ONE WORD AND STICK TO IT.
IS THIS WHERE SATAN LIVED?
NO, IT'S AFTER HIS TIME. HEY, WHAT ABOUT OUR CONTRACT?
WE HAD A CONTRACT, RIGHT?
THE CONTRACT IS VOID.
ERITI, LET THIS PALACE BE REARED A THOUSAND STORIES HIGH, AND BE SHEATHED IN CRYSTAL AND RARE GEMS.
TO ANNOUNCE THAT HELL HAS A NEW MASTER NOW.

UHH-- TASTEFUL. REALLY.
WORTHY OF A DONALD TRUMP.
BUT WHERE ARE THOSE WHO WILL *DWELL* IN MY DOMAIN?
YOU TWO SHALL BE MY *VALKYRIES* NOW, AND FURNISH *GUESTS* FOR MY TABLE.
YOU SEE HIS *PUPILS?*
THEY GOT REAL *SMALL*, DIDN'T THEY?
HAVE A *CARE*, CREATURE. IF YOU OFFEND ME, I WILL HAVE *HARPIES* PLUCK OUT YOUR EYES.
HEY, LOOK *AROUND*. THE HARPIES *LEFT* ALREADY.
SILENCE! BRING ME *WOMEN* TO ADMIRE MY *GLORY.*
BEAUTIFUL, *NUBILE* YOUNG WOMEN!
THIS GESTURE MEANS *NUBILE?*
YOU'D BETTER LET *ME* DO THE CHOOSING.

SO THE DEMONS WENT FORTH TO DO MY BIDDING.
LEAVING ME TO PONDER THE MATTER OF THE MENU.
IS SHE BEAUTIFUL?
I'D RATE HER A HUGGABLE EIGHT.
COULD YOU KEEP A HOLD ON THEM? THEY KEEP WANDERING OFF AGAIN.
NO, THE SWANS SHOULD BE CARVED FROM ICE!
FROM ICE!
OH. OKAY.
I GET IT.
PARFAIT 10
AND CAVIAR!
A TOWER OF CAVIAR, TALLER THAN A MAN!

OKAY, WE GOT YOU SOME EUPHEMISTIC "GUESTS."
BUT THERE'S A PROBLEM.
WHAT PROBLEM?
WHAT CAN I TELL YOU? THEY'RE ZOMBIES. THEY'VE HAD A MYSTICAL-NAME-OF-GOD LOBOTOMY.
THEIR WILL WENT OUT THE WINDOW, SAME AS EVERYONE ELSE IN THE HUMAN GOD-DAMN RACE.
HMM. YES, I SEE. BEAUTIFUL BUT EMPTY-- LIKE PAINTED SHELLS.
YEAH. GOOD ANALOGY.
I WAS THINKING "LIGHTS ON, NOBODY HOME," BUT YOURS IS BETTER.
ERITI, MAKE THESE LOVELY CREATURES SIMULATE ALL THE EMOTIONS THEY CANNOT FEEL.
MOVE THEM LIKE PUPPETS, SO THAT THEY APPEAR EXCITED. VIVACIOUS. ALLURING.
MMMM. KEEP DOING THAT, LOVER.
I LIKE IT.

I TOOK MY *PLACE.*
AND THE *REVELS* BEGAN.
PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE MADE MORE *SERVANTS* TO ATTEND ME.
OR AT LEAST MADE THE ONES I *HAD* LOOK MORE *DECOROUS.*
I CAN'T *TAKE* THIS.
IMBECILE!
I JUST CAN'T *TAKE* IT.
BUT MY *HANDS*-- AND MY *MIND*--
--WERE BUSY WITH *OTHER* THINGS.
KILL
RIP
MAIM
RINSE
REPEAT
STOP FEELING *SORRY* FOR YOURSELF. THINK OF THOSE POOR *WOMEN.*

WILL THINKING ABOUT *THEM* IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF *MY* SELF-PITY?
THIS IS *YOUR* FAULT, GAUDIUM.
YEAH, BUT HEY. IF *I* WASN'T AROUND, WHO WOULD YOU HAVE TO FEEL *SUPERIOR* TO?
THIS NEEDS TO BE SORTED *OUT.*
WE CAN *ARGUE* ABOUT IT LATER.
MORE *WINE,* MY LOVE?
WHAT NEED HAVE I OF *WINE,* SIR, WHILE *YOU* ARE NEAR?
YOUR FACE, YOUR VOICE, ARE *HEADY* DRAUGHTS ENOUGH.
HE *IS* PRETTY HUNKY, ISN'T HE?
WAIT! WE'RE NOT *DONE* WITH--
IT'S THAT CUTE LITTLE *BEARD* THAT DOES IT FOR ME.
OF COURSE, THEY SAY *POWER* IS THE ULTIMATE APHRODISIAC.
BUT HE SCORES BIG *THERE* TOO, DOESN'T HE?
DON'T YOU HAVE DUTIES IN THE *KITCHEN,* MISBEGOTTEN IMP?

IGNORE HER, DARLING. I CAN GIVE YOU ALL YOU NEED.
YES, IGNORE ME. SNIF...
I'M SO FAR BENEATH YOU, I'M JUST A-- AN INSIGNIFICANT, LOVELORN SPECK.
HOW COULD I EVEN ASPIRE TO AN OMNIPOTENT LOVE-GOD LIKE YOU?
AND WHY SHOULD YOU WASTE THE LITTLE TIME YOU'VE GOT LEFT ON ONE SO UGLY AS ME?
WHAT?
YOU DESERVE YOUR BRIEF HAPPINESS.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
AND I MY BITTER SOLITUDE.
STOP!
EXPLAIN YOURSELF, EXCRESCENCE, OR FACE MY ANGER.
I JUST MEANT-- YOU KNOW-- THAT THE POWERS WILL BE COMING SOON.
THE POWERS? WHAT POWERS?
THE USUAL ONES.
THE ANGELS.
THE HELL-KIN.
THE GODS OF THE EIGHTY-SEVEN PANTHEONS.
THE ENDLESS.
THE FAERIE FOLK.
THE LORDS OF CHAOS AND ORDER.
DID I MISS ONE? I THINK I MISSED ONE.

WHAT DO I CARE FOR *THEM?* I AM *ALL-POWERFUL.*
YEAH, I *KNOW.*
AND THEY'RE GONNA BE SO *PISSED* WHEN THEY FIND OUT.
YOU'LL BE THE NEW KID ON THE *BLOCK.* THE CHALLENGER. THEY'LL *ALL* WANT TO TAKE YOU TO THE MAT.
OOOH! THAT'S SUCH AN *EROTIC* IMAGE.
THIS IS *MY* DOMAIN.
SURE. FOR *NOW.*
FOR *ETERNITY.* I WILL ADMIT NO *RIVALS.*
GOOD *LUCK* WITH THAT.
LUCK BE DAMNED! I *COMMAND* IT!
ERITI, LET *NO* POWER OTHER THAN *MINE* HAVE EFFECT IN THIS REALM.
GODS, ANGELS, DEVILS-- LET *ALL* THEIR PUISSANCE *FAIL* THEM.

WHAT-- WHAT'S *HAPPENING?*
NOTHING TO *WORRY* ABOUT.
YOU'RE GETTING YOUR *WISH,* IS ALL.
NO! MY BANQUET! MY *WOMEN!*
THIS ISN'T WHAT I ASKED FOR!
OH, YES IT *IS.*
DID I *MISS* SOMETHING?
ONLY THE *PUNCH LINE.* MISTER BIG HERE JUST SAID THAT NO POWER EXCEPT *HIS* SHOULD WORK HERE IN HELL.
NO DEMONS. NO GODS. NOT EVEN *MUMMIFIED* ONES.
OH NO!
OH NO!
IN *OTHER* WORDS--
--HE *SHORT-CIRCUITED* ERIT!.

NO!
WHICH WAY IS THE EXIT, ANYWAY?
WAIT!
I THINK WE CAME IN ON THE MEZZANINE.
AT THIS POINT I TRIED TO REOPEN NEGOTIATIONS.
PLEASE! MY SOUL FOR A SINGLE WISH!
YOU HEAR SOMETHING?
BUT TO NO AVAIL.
I BEG YOU! YOU CAN NAME YOUR OWN TERMS!
I APPEAL TO YOUR HUMANITY!
NAH. NOT EVEN IF I HAD ANY, PAL.
AND SO BEGAN THIS BITTER, LONELY EXILE.
MY SOUL, MY LIVER AND MY LEFT AAAAAARM!
IN A VERY PRIVATE HELL WHERE I WAS OBLIGED TO BE BOTH TORTURED AND TORMENTOR.
AHUH
OH PLEASE!
AHUH
OH PLEASE!
AHUH
OH PLEASE!
IT WAS ALL I COULD DO TO KEEP MY DIGNITY.

ONE LUMP OR *TWO?*
UMM--
COME ON, MAKE UP YOUR *MIND.*
SHOULD THERE EVEN *BE* LUMPS IN CAPPUCCINO?
HEY, AT LEAST I GOT MOST OF THE SCUM OFF THE TOP.
THIS IS AS GOOD AS IT *GETS.*
GLUT GLUT GLUT GLUT GLUT
SLLLP
YOU KNOW WHAT JEAN-PAUL *SARTRE* SAID ABOUT *HELL?*
SOMETHING *WAY* OFF THE BEAM, I'M GUESSING.
"L'ENFER, C'EST LES *AUTRES.*" HELL IS OTHER *PEOPLE.*
GET OUT OF *TOWN.*
BUT THEN--
DON'T FUCKING *SAY* IT, SPERA.
--HE'D NEVER DRUNK YOUR COFFEE.
The End

MELEOS:
WARS IN *HEAVEN* ARE SELDOM MARKED BY STRATEGIC *BRILLIANCE* OR TACTICAL BRAVURA.
BUT *OCCASIONALLY* THEY OFFER A SURPRISING *REVERSAL* OF FORTUNE.
THE *LILIM* BROUGHT THE SILVER CITY DOWN TO ARMAGEDDON PLAIN, AND *BOMBARDED* ITS WALLS UNTIL THEY OFFERED NO MORE *PROTECTION* THAN BEAD CURTAINS.
THEN THEIR GENERAL, *MISRAN,* CALLED A FINAL CHARGE WHICH *OUGHT* TO HAVE BEEN PURE FORMALITY.
BUT *LUCIFER MORNINGSTAR,* THE FORMER PRINCE OF HELL, PLACED HIMSELF IN THE PATH OF THE CHARGE AND IT *FOUNDERED.*
MOST OF THE LILIM ASSUMED THAT WITH THE *LIGHTBRINGER* NOW ARRAYED AGAINST THEM, THE BATTLE WAS *LOST.*
FENRIS *DISABUSED* THEM OF THIS NOTION WITH A THROWN *SPEAR.*
PROVING BOTH THAT LUCIFER WAS *VULNERABLE* AND THAT ALL WAS STILL TO *PLAY* FOR.
WITH RENEWED VIGOR AND COURAGE, THE LILIM *HURLED* THEMSELVES ON THE MORNINGSTAR AND HIS COMPANIONS IN A LIVING *WAVE--*

]

--TO THE IMMENSE *CHAGRIN* OF THEIR NEWEST ALLY.
STOP!
YOU PUKING, PULING *OFFAL,* STOP!
I GAVE YOU AN OOOORDER!
FENRIS, THEY'RE DEAD. WE *SAW* THEM FALL.
THEN WHERE ARE THE *BODIES?*
WHERE ARE THE BASTARD *BODIES?*
BWAAAAA
BWAAAAA
SO YOUR TRUMPETERS *DO* KNOW HOW TO SOUND SOMETHING OTHER THAN *RETREAT.*
THAT'S AN *ALARUM.*
I-- I DON'T *UNDERSTAND* THIS. ANOTHER *FORCE* HAS ENTERED THE FIELD.

THE ARMIES OF *HELL* WERE MARCHING UNDER THE BANNER OF THEIR NEW *RULER,* CHRISTOPHER RUDD--
--WHOSE PECULIAR GENIUS IT WAS TO UNITE DAMNED AND DEMONS INTO A SINGLE LEGION.
HE HAD *INTENDED* TO USE THIS IRRESISTIBLE HORDE TO BRING HEAVEN TO ITS *KNEES.* BUT THEN LORD LUCIFER SUGGESTED THAT HE MIGHT INSTEAD COMMIT IT IN HEAVEN'S *DEFENSE.* WHICH *CONUNDRUM* EXPLAINS HIS LATE ARRIVAL--
--AND THE *UNCERTAINTY* OF THOSE WHO SAW HIM COME.

MORNINGSTAR

PART 4 OF 6

MIKE CAREY writer • PETER GROSS & RYAN KELLY artists
JARED K. FLETCHER lettering • DANIEL VOZZO colors
MICHAEL Wm. KALUTA cover painter
ANGELA RUFINO asst. editor • SHELLY BOND editor
Based on characters created by GAIMAN, KIETH, & DRINGENBERG

MAJESTY, THE LILIM HAVE BROUGHT THEIR *INFANTRY* ABOUT TO FACE US--
AND THE *CITY?*
--HAS NOT *RESPONDED* AT ALL. THE HEAVEN-HOST GUARD WHAT TOWERS ARE LEFT INTACT, BUT THEY SEEM TO HAVE *ABANDONED* THE WALLS.
THEN WE'LL NOT NEED THE *SIEGE ENGINES.*
UNLIMBER THEM. WE'LL MAKE BETTER *SPEED* WITHOUT.
GENERALS ALL, TAKE YOUR *PLACES.* CLOY AND DUROVALLIS ON THE *HEIGHTS.* DUMA IN THE *CENTER.*
WAIT FOR MY *SIGNAL.* IT WILL COME AS SOON AS YOU'RE IN *POSITION.*
MY LORD, RUDD-- JUST TO CLARIFY--
--DO WE ATTACK THE *CITY,* OR THOSE LAYING *SIEGE* TO IT?
BOTH, BALTHURIEL.
WE ATTACK *BOTH.*

THEY'RE COMING AGAINST US.
GOD'S GALL, WE'RE UNDER ATTACK.
FENRIS, WE'RE CAUGHT BETWEEN THE CITY AND THIS NEW--
WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
SNF SNF SNF
THE SCENT FADES INTO EMPTY AIR.
HE DID NOT DIE HERE.
WE HAVE NOWHERE TO RETREAT TO! WHAT SHOULD WE DO?
FIGHT. WIN, OR BE DEFEATED. DIE.
MAKE YOUR OWN ARRANGEMENTS. I'M NOT YOUR KEEPER.
I GO AGAINST THE THRONE OF PRIMUM MOBILE.
AS I DID FROM THE BEGINNING.

LUCIFER'S CREATION.
THE TOWN OF *RIVER HOLT.*
GUUUH!

QU-QUARTER!
MAZIKEEN, WE ARE *KIN!* GIVE ME *QUARTER!*
HELP HIM! HE'S *HURT!*
HE'S YOUR *MAKER,* AND HE'S HURT!
ESA-CORLA, BE *CAREFUL.* THE ONE-EYED WOMAN IS *BERSERKER.*
THANK YOU, WENETH. I *SEE* THAT.
BUT FOR THE SAKE OF HIM SHE *LOVES--*
--SHE WILL LET ME *PASS,* AND OFFER ME NO *HARM.*

HE'S WOUNDED IN THE SIDE. A SPEAR CAST.
WILL YOU WORK A HEALING? I'M SPENT FROM BRINGING US HERE.
SWEET LADY, I WILL. AND COUNT MYSELF BLESSED THAT I LIVED TO DO YOU THIS SERVICE.
HE IS YOUR MAKER.
AND YOU ARE ELAINE. THE MEDIATOR. THE VESSEL OF ALL MERCIES, WHO MAY NOT BE PRAISED--
--BUT WHO WE LOVE IN THE SILENCE OF OUR HEARTS.
THE WOUND IS DEEP, BUT I CAN CLOSE IT.
AND HE HADN'T TIME TO LOSE MUCH BLOOD, SO I DOUBT NOT THAT HE WILL HEAL WITH PROPER REST.
WITH-- PROPER-- REST?
I PRESUME-- THAT'S INTENDED-- AS A JOKE OF SOME KIND.
TAKE ME BACK TO THE CITY.
THIS SIDESHOW HAS EATEN UP ENOUGH TIME ALREADY.

RUDD'S *TIMING,* AFTER HIS LONG AND LEGENDARY *HESITATION,* WAS IMMACULATE.
HIS HELL-KIN *TRAPPED* THE LILIM AGAINST THE CITY WALLS AND THRESHED THEM LIKE WHEAT.
LILITH HERSELF WAS SEEN IN THE THICK OF THE FRAY, *EMBATTLED* BUT REFUSING TO SUBMIT.
SEEING HER AS THE *KEY* TO ANY TRUCE, RUDD HAD ORDERED SHE BE TAKEN *ALIVE.*
AT THE SAME TIME, *DUMA* LED THE DAMNED INTO THE CITY THROUGH *BREACHES* THE LILIM HAD ALREADY MADE.
AND THE *HEAVEN-HOST,* ABASHED, SURRENDERED WITHOUT A *FIGHT.* FOR THE DISPOSITION OF THESE DAMNED SOULS WAS ALREADY *ORDAINED,* AND THEREFORE TO END THEM WAS TO GO AGAINST *YAHWEH'S* DECREE.
WITHIN THE CITY, THEN, VICTORY WAS *BLOODLESS.*
THE ANGELS *SUBMITTING* TO THEIR FATE WITH BEMUSED AWE, AS IF THEY COULD NOT QUITE *BELIEVE* THIS DAY HAD COME.
WHILE ON *ARMAGEDDON* PLAIN BLOOD RAN IN *RIVERS.*
AS HAD INDEED BEEN *PROPHESIED,* A GREAT WHILE BEFORE.

YOU. SOLDIER.
THIS CATAPULT IS LEFT IN *YOUR* CHARGE?
AYE, LORD. IT *IS.*
THEN *USE* IT. SET THE *ELEVATION* AS HIGH AS YOU CAN--
--AND *LAUNCH* ME AT THE CITY.
YAHWEH, I WILL STRIKE PRIMUM MOBILE LIKE A *PLANET.*
I *SWEAR* IT.
THERE WILL BE *NO* RESURRECTION. NO NEW *DAWN.*
FOR YOU OR *ANYONE.*

SNF SNF SNF
AAAAAH! NOW THERE-- THERE IT *IS* AGAIN.
LEAD ME THE REST OF THE *WAY,* MORNINGSTAR.
LEAD ME TO THE *THRONE.*

THANK YOU, DUMA. AN *IMMACULATE* MANEUVER.
ARE YOU THE *LEADER* OF THE HEAVEN-HOST?
WE HAVE NO LEADER, SO *ANY* MAY SPEAK FOR THE WHOLE. I AM *ACHIRIEL,* OF THE SERAPHIM.
AND I'M RUDD. OF THE *DAMNED.*
IN THE NAME OF NATURAL *JUSTICE* I RECEIVE YOUR SURRENDER. DIVINE PROVIDENCE IS *ENDED.*
THE PLAN BANKRUPT, AND THE *PLANNER* FLED.
IT REMAINS FOR US NOW TO FORGE A *BETTER* ORDER.
MAN, YOU CANNOT TAKE *ISSUE* WITH YOUR CREATOR!
ANGEL, I *DO.*
YOU HAVE BEEN *JUDGED--*
AND NOW I *JUDGE* IN MY TURN.
BALTHURIEL, HAS *LUCIFER* BEEN SEEN? OR HIS *COMPANION,* ELAINE?
NO, MAJESTY. WE'RE SEARCHING THE *FIELD* FOR THEIR BODIES.
CONTINUE. AND LET ME *KNOW* THE MINUTE THERE'S ANY--

Master Rudd.
MORNINGSTAR. YOU SEEM TO HAVE TAKEN A LONGER *ROAD* THAN US.
FOR WE ARE HERE *BEFORE* YOU.
You've *captured* the city?
IT SEEMED A GOOD WAY OF SQUARING THE *CIRCLE.*
HEAVEN IS *FALLEN--* BUT IT'S *SAFE* IN MY HANDS.
Then let's get to *business.*
Elaine Belloc has to *sit* on the throne of Primum Mobile, and claim her birth-right.
OR *nothing* is safe.
THAT-- THAT IS THE *FOULEST* BLASPHEMY.
Then your *choice* is between blasphemy and annihilation, because it's the only way.
LUCIFER--
--WHAT GOOD WILL SITTING ON HIS *THRONE* DO? IT WON'T BRING HIM BACK.
AND WHY ME?
WHY NOT *YOU?*
Because my priorities are *different* from yours.
I'll see creation *fall* rather than sit in that chair.
and you have the same *choice,* of course.

THE HOST WILL NOT *ACCEPT* THIS!
THE HOST, SIR, WILL NOT BE *ASKED*. YOU ARE MY *PRISONERS* NOW.
THE RIGHT TO ACCEPT OR DENY HAS *PASSED* FROM YOUR HANDS.
SHALL WE AT LEAST GO AND *SEE* THIS THRONE?
I-- YES. I SUPPOSE.
MORNINGSTAR, WILL YOU LEAD THE *WAY?*
THAT WOULD BE MY *PLEASURE.*
YOUR PLEASURE IS *BLOOD!* YOU SLEW YOUR OWN BROTHER!
YES, DUMA. HE *DIED* AMONG THE ROOTS OF YGGDRASIL.
I *KILLED* HIM. IN A MADNESS THAT FENRIS THE *WOLF* INFLICTED ON ME.
WELL, THERE'LL BE TIME FOR *GRIEF* LATER.
OR ELSE THERE *WON'T*. AND WE'LL BE SPARED THE *TROUBLE.*

OUT ON THE PLAIN, THE LAST FEW POCKETS OF LILIM RESISTANCE WERE SUMMARILY CRUSHED.
THE WOUNDED WERE TENDED TO, WHERE THEY ALLOWED IT, AND THE PRISONERS SECURED.
LILITH WAS FOUND UNDERNEATH HER HORSE, HER LEGS AND LOWER BODY CRUSHED.
SHE WEPT FOR HER CHILDREN, WHO SHE HAD LED TO THIS PLACE, AND SHE WOULD NOT BE COMFORTED.
I LOVED AN ANGEL! THAT WAS WHERE MY DEATH BEGAN.
AND THESE DEATHS, TOO. ALL THESE.
YOU'LL NOT DIE, MADAM. OUR KING SETS GREAT STORE BY YOUR LIFE.
BRIADACH. BRIADACH, MY SWEET BOY!
OUR HEARTS', OUR SOULS' UNION.
BRING HIM TO ME. LET ME SEE--
AAAARRGHH!!
CUT HER LOOSE. BUT BLOOD AND LIGHTS, STIFLE HER FIRST.
NO ONE SAID WE HAD TO LISTEN TO THAT.

THESE STEPS SEEM **NEVER-ENDING,** MORNINGSTAR.
Funny. **Most** times when I've passed this way I wished they were **longer.**
What was waiting at the **top** was always **worse.**
WE ARE **PURSUED.**
Fenris. He mustn't enter the **throne** room.
HE **WON'T.** I'LL BIND HIM WITH MY **ENTRAILS** IF IT COMES TO IT.
VERY LAUDABLE, MAZIKEEN. BUT I'VE A **BETTER** SUGGESTION.
YOU'RE **WOUNDED,** AND I'VE SOME SMALL SKILL WITH A **SWORD** MYSELF.
I'LL GUARD THE STAIR. BUT VOUCHSAFE ME A WORD WITH THE **LADY,** FIRST.
Make it a **quick** word, then.

HAVE YOU MADE YOUR *DECISION?*
WHAT *CHOICE* HAVE I GOT? IF I SAY *NO,* ALL THIS HAS BEEN FOR NOTHING.
LUCIFER KNEW ALL *ALONG* I COULDN'T REFUSE.
THEN PROMISE ME *THIS.* IF CREATION ENDURES, *REBUILD* IT WITHOUT A HEAVEN OR A HELL.
LET SICK SOULS BE *HEALED,* NOT WHIPPED LIKE DOGS NOR *BARTERED* LIKE SWEETMEATS.
IF I HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH REBUILDING, CHRISTOPHER RUDD, THERE WON'T *BE* A HELL.
I DON'T HAVE THE *STOMACH* FOR IT.
THEN I'M *ANSWERED.* GO TO, LADY, AND FARE *WELL.*
EVERY *SECOND* YOU BUY US WILL BE WORTH *HAVING.*
THEN I'LL BE A *MERCHANT* FOR ONCE.
BUY *CHEAP,* AND *SELL* DEAR.

Primum mobile. If you're going to *do* this, it had better be *now*.
You *heard* my answer on the stairs.
Not that you were ever in any *doubt* about it.
All right.
What do I have to *do?*
Speak the *words*.
Just as they *come*.

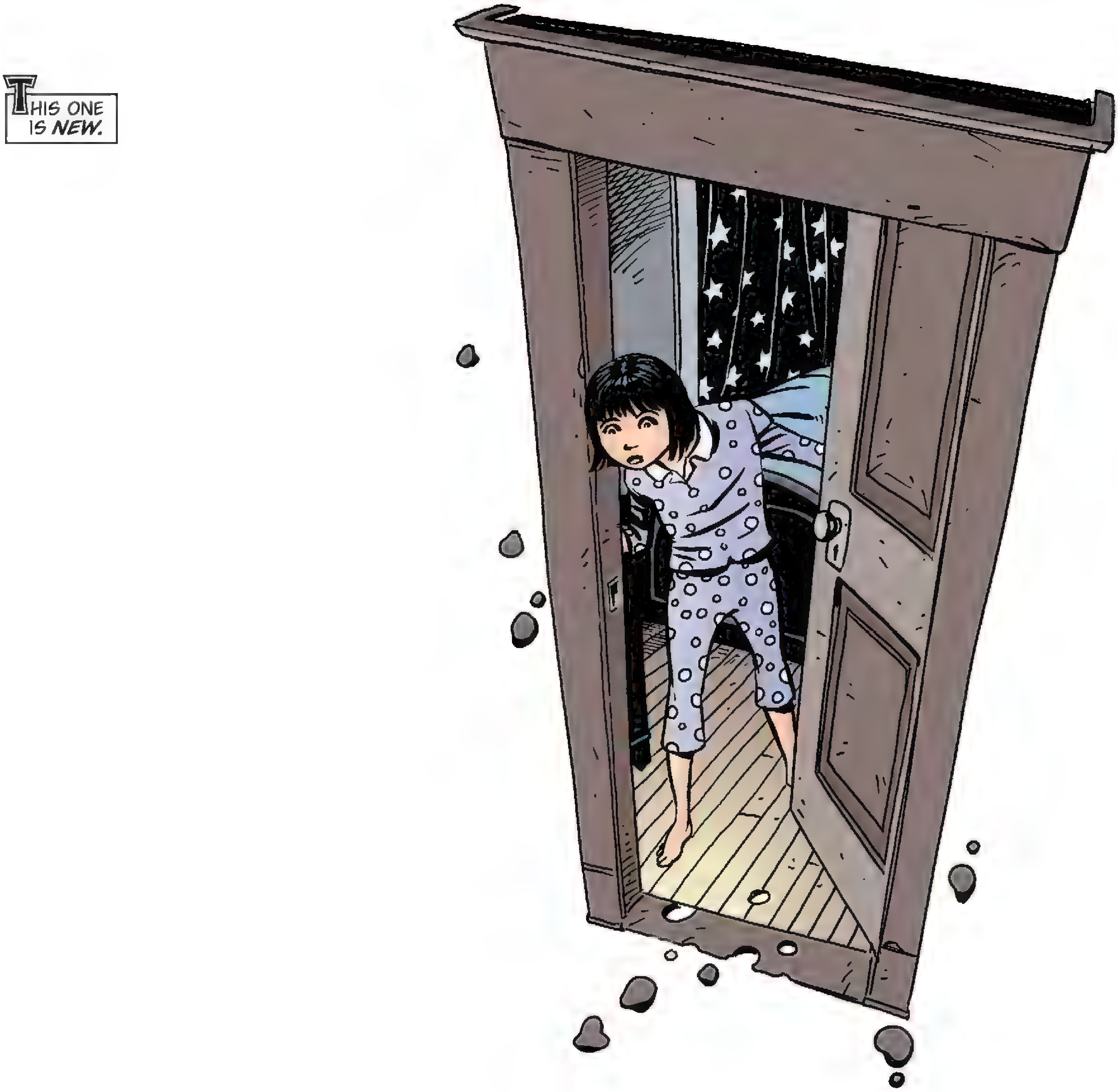
WHY DO YOU BAR MY *WAY,* DEAD MAN?
I SCARCELY KNOW *MYSELF.* SO THAT THE DEAD MIGHT *LIVE,* PERHAPS.
AND THE *TORTURED* KNOW PEACE.
AH, BUT DEATH AND TORTURE ARE FIRM *FRIENDS* OF MINE.
SO YOU AND I MUST BE *FOES,* IT SEEMS.
LAY *ON.*

I HAVE NO *PATIENCE* WITH THIS.
THEN YIELD, AND *LIVE.*
I'M *IMMORTAL,* YOU DOLT. I'M THE GOD OF *DESTRUCTION.*
AND *EVERYTHING* THAT RAVELS, RAPES OR RENDS IS A *GARMENT* FOR ME TO WEAR.
LET ME *SHOW* YOU.

I AM *ELAINE.*
THE DAUGHTER OF *MICHAEL DEMIURGOS.*
THE SCION OF *YAHWEH,* WITHOUT WHOM *WAS* NOT ANYTHING MADE WHICH WAS MADE.
I PROCLAIM MY *LINEAGE* IN THIS HOLY PLACE.
I ASSERT THE *RIGHT* OF MY--

TO DESPAIR IS A TERRIBLE SIN, WE HAD BEEN TAUGHT.
THE CONSCIENCE THAT MAKES *COWARDS* OF US ALL. THE SURRENDER THAT MAKES THE WORST INEVITABLE.
BUT NOW, IN GOOD TRUTH--
--ALL OTHER OPTIONS SEEMED *FINALLY* TO HAVE BEEN EXHAUSTED.

NOEMA, CHILD OF THE BASANOS:
"THERE ARE *MORE* THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH..."
ELAINE BELLOC *SLEEPS.* A CHILD'S SLEEP. THE SLEEP OF THE *JUST.*
BUT HER DREAMS ARE *STRANGE.* A SKY WITH NO SUN. *ARMIES* IN FRENETIC MOTION.
IMPOSSIBLY PERFECT *CITIES* TUMBLING INTO RUIN.
UNTIL SHE *WAKES.* NOT WITH A START. NOT WITH A RUSH OF *FEAR,* OR A STAMMERING HEART.
BUT WITH THE QUESTION "*WHERE?*" PUSHING AT HER MIND.
AND THEN, A MOMENT LATER, "*HOW?*"
SKIRTING FOR THE MOMENT THE MATTER OF *WHO,* WHICH IS THE MOST *DISTURBING* QUESTION OF ALL.
I WAS BORN SIX *DAYS* AGO, BUT LIKE *ARGUS,* I SEE ALL THERE IS TO SEE.
EVEN WHAT'S *INVISIBLE.* EVEN WHAT'S BEEN HIDDEN ON *PURPOSE.*
I KNOW *EXACTLY* HOW MANY THINGS THERE ARE IN HEAVEN AND EARTH--
--BECAUSE I'VE *COUNTED* THEM.


THIS ONE IS *NEW.*

MORNINGSTAR

PART 5 OF 6

MIKE CAREY writer • **PETER GROSS & RYAN KELLY** artists
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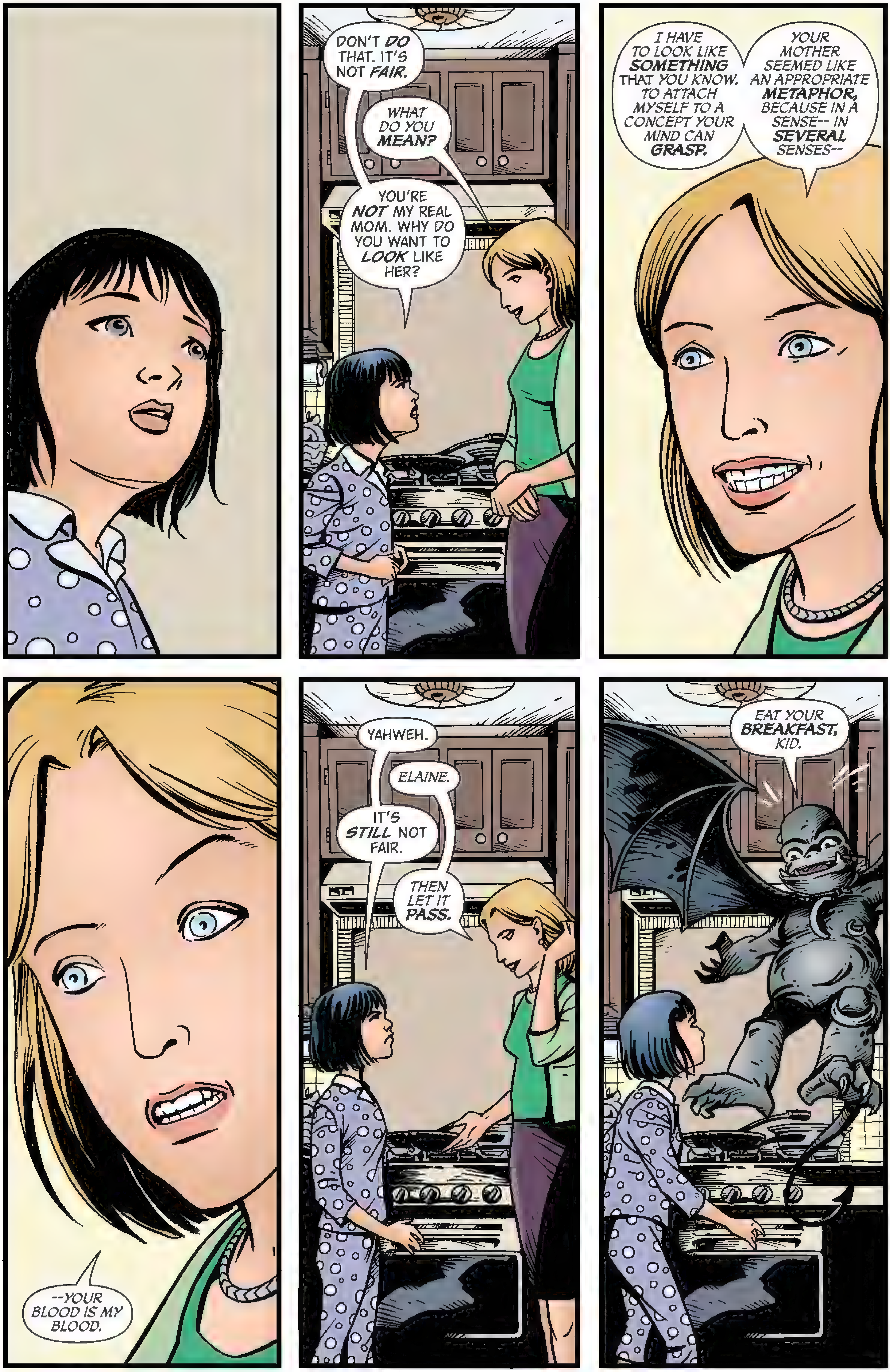
THE SILVER CITY.
THE TOWER OF THE PRIMUM MOBILE.
OUTSIDE ON THE *STEPS,* CHRISTOPHER RUDD LIES BURNED AND *BROKEN.*
WHILE *INSIDE,* THE THRONE OF GOD HAS JUST BEEN REDUCED TO SMOLDERING *SHRAPNEL--*
--WHEN FENRIS THE *WOLF* MANIFESTED HIMSELF AS A BOLT OF *LIGHTNING.*
I CAME TO *WATCH,* BUT I MISSED THE ACTUAL *MOMENT.*
WHERE MY OWN *FATE* IS CONCERNED-- AND *ALL* FATES ARE AT STAKE HERE-- MY FORESIGHT'S NOT *PERFECT.* I CAN STILL BE--
--SURPRISED.
YOU.
ME. WOULD YOU HARM A *CHILD,* DAUGHTER OF LILITH?
KNOWING WHAT YOU'RE THE CHILD *OF?* IN A *HEARTBEAT.*

BUT I'M NOT YOUR ENEMY.
HE IS.
THIS PLACE IS THE WOMB OF CREATION. IT RESISTS FENRIS AS A HEALTHY ORGANISM RESISTS DISEASE.
BUT HE'S STRONG NOW. HE'LL TAKE FLESHLY FORM AGAIN, AND THEN--
NO. HE WON'T.

ELAINE BELLOC HAS BECOME USED TO THE IMPOSSIBLE. IT DOESN'T TROUBLE HER MUCH NOW TO STAND IN A PLACE THAT CAN'T EXIST.
AND THE ONLY WAY TO GO HERE IS DOWN.
SO DOWN SHE GOES.
AS STAIRCASE, WALLS, CEILING, LIGHT, AIR, AND SOUND CREATE THEMSELVES AROUND HER.
THE RED CARPET OF REALITY UNROLLING IN ALL ITS SPLENDOR UNDERNEATH HER FEET.
AND ALL THE DETAILS-- EVERY LAST ONE-- EXACTLY RIGHT.
THE CLATTER FROM THE KITCHEN.
THE SMELLS OF FRESH COFFEE AND SINGED TOAST.
THE TINNY SOUND OF RADIO THREE ON A WOOFERLESS BOOM-BOX.
THE MUSIC FURTHER DESECRATED BY AN OFF-KEY HUMMING--
--WHICH FILLS HER WITH NOSTALGIA AND FEAR IN EQUAL MEASURE.
HELLO, MY LOVE.
TAKE THE TOAST OUT OF THE GRILL FOR ME, WILL YOU?


DON'T DO THAT. IT'S NOT FAIR.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
YOU'RE NOT MY REAL MOM. WHY DO YOU WANT TO LOOK LIKE HER?
I HAVE TO LOOK LIKE SOMETHING THAT YOU KNOW. TO ATTACH MYSELF TO A CONCEPT YOUR MIND CAN GRASP.
YOUR MOTHER SEEMED LIKE AN APPROPRIATE METAPHOR, BECAUSE IN A SENSE-- IN SEVERAL SENSES--
--YOUR BLOOD IS MY BLOOD.
YAHWEH.
ELAINE.
IT'S STILL NOT FAIR.
THEN LET IT PASS.
EAT YOUR BREAKFAST, KID.

DO YOU JUST-- IS THIS SOME KIND OF-- OF CRUEL GAME?
IS THIS WHERE YOU STEP IN AND SAVE EVERYBODY, SO WE THANK YOU AND START WORSHIPPING YOU AGAIN?
NO, THIS IS NOT A GAME. PLEASE EAT.
I MADE YOUR BREAKFAST SLOWLY. ONE ELEMENT AT A TIME. PIECEMEAL.
WHERE ARE WE? WHY DID YOU BRING ME HERE?
TO TALK. THIS IS THE TIME AND THE PLACE OF TALKING.
STOP-- STOP CHANGING! JUST BE ONE PERSON-- SOMEONE I DON'T KNOW.
THEN WE'LL TALK. AND AFTER THAT, I WANT TO-- I'D LIKE YOU TO SEND ME BACK.
I'LL DO THAT IF I CAN, ELAINE.
BUT WE'LL NEED TO WAIT A MOMENT OR TWO.
UNTIL MY OTHER GUEST ARRIVES.

HOW DO YOU FIGHT SMOKE?
WHAT SORT OF WARFARE WORKS BEST ON FOG?
FENRIS DISEMBODIED, TENUOUS AND DISPERSED IS A LESS FEARSOME OPPONENT THAN FENRIS ARMORED IN FLESH.
THE MORNINGSTAR AND HIS HARLOT, MAZIKEEN, PRESS HIM HARD. DENYING HIM THE MOMENTS HE NEEDS TO GATHER AND CONDENSE HIMSELF.
EVEN DUMA, THE GENTLEST AND MOST PEACEABLE OF ANGELS, SEES WHAT'S AT STAKE AND HELPS AS BEST HE CAN.
AND IN TRUTH THE MOMENT SEEMS TO FAVOR THEM. THE BALANCE TILTS. THE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES NARROW TO A POINT.
I AM NOEMA, CHILD OF THE BASANOS.
THAT POINT IS MY SCALPEL.

NOW THE FIGHT SEEMS *FAIRER,* MORNINGSTAR. THE FORCES MORE EVENLY *BALANCED.*
BUT WHAT'S *BALANCE,* AFTER ALL?
JUSTICE CARRIES A *SWORD--*
--AS *WELL* AS SCALES.
OH, YOU *GODS.* YOU POWERS AND PRESENCES AND PURVEYORS OF *PROVIDENCE.*
THIS MUST *SURELY* BE THE LAST FIGHT OF ALL.

SO THE WOLF SMILES? WELL, LET HIM SMILE. PROVIDENCE FLOWS AROUND HIM AND FINDS ITS LEVEL ELSEWHERE.
THE BATTLE ON ARMAGEDDON PLAIN IS OVER. THE WOUNDED ARE BROUGHT WITHIN THE CITY GATES.
SO MANY SPENT SO CASUALLY. FLUNG DOWN LIKE COINS UPON A TABLE.
EASY, THERE!
THE TREASURE SPILLED TO BUY THIS FALLEN PLACE--
SOLDIER.
SOLDIER.
--AND ONE OF THE PURCHASERS.
WHAT IS IT, LADY?
MY DAUGHTER, MAZIKEEN. DOES SHE LIVE? DOES SHE THRIVE?
I TRIED TO KILL HER, BUT IT BROKE MY HEART.
SHE IS SO LIKE ME. IT'S-- AMAZING TO SEE.
WE MUST LEARN NOT TO LOVE, SOLDIER.
I WAS NEVER CRUEL UNTIL I LOV--

AH. GOOD.
NOW I BELIEVE WE MAY BEGIN.
ELAINE BELLOC, THIS IS LILITH.
LILITH-- MY GRANDDAUGHTER, ELAINE.
WH-WHAT?
BEGIN WHAT?
WHAT ARE YOU, AND WHAT PLACE IS THIS?
THIS PLACE IS HARD TO EXPLAIN. BUT I AM THE ARCHITECT OF ALL YOUR MISFORTUNES.
I AM GOD.
AAAHRR!
PERHAPS WE SHOULD GO OUTSIDE.
I THINK THIS MAY BE EASIER THERE.

MIND THE STEP.
AS YOU PROBABLY REMEMBER, ELAINE, IT'S A LITTLE STEEP.
THIS ISN'T THE EARTH.
HOW CAN YOU BE SURE?
BECAUSE THE MOON LOOKS-- WRONG. THE WRONG COLOR.
OH, THAT? NO, THAT ISN'T THE MOON.
IT'S THE WHOLE OF CREATION, SEEN FROM OUTSIDE.
IN FACT, THIS IS WHY I BROUGHT YOU HERE.
I'D LIKE YOU TO HELP ME DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH IT.

THEY CALL LUCIFER THE *MORNINGSTAR.* BUT THIS IS THE EVENING OF THE WORLDS, AND HE IS *NOT* THE POWER HE WAS.
STILL, TO SEE HIM *RISE* SO SLOWLY-- SO DOGGEDLY--
--TO SEE HIM PLUCK THE BLOODIED *KNIFE* FROM HIS OWN BACK--
--BECAUSE HE NEEDS A *WEAPON,* AND IT'S THE ONLY ONE TO *HAND*--
IT GIVES ME *PAUSE.* IT MAKES ME *WONDER,* FOR A MOMENT, IF I'VE MADE AN ERROR.
HIS WILL IS *INFINITE.* AND IT'S HARD TO FEED INFINITY INTO AN *EQUATION.*
BUT NO. THINGS FALL AS THEY *MUST* FALL.
EVERY SEED MUST FIND ITS *FLOWER.*
AND DOG WILL HAVE HIS *DAY.*

FLEXIBILITY WAS THE LAST VIRTUE I LEARNED. BECAUSE THE PLAN THAT CONTAINED ALL THINGS LEFT NO MARGIN FOR ERROR.
BUT THIS MOMENT I LEFT AS OPEN AS I COULD.
I ARRANGED ONLY THAT TWO WOULD JOIN ME HERE. I DID NOT KNOW WHO WOULD COME.
THAT WAS WHY I LEFT. SO THAT I COULD EXPERIENCE NOT KNOWING. SO THAT A LITTLE RANDOMNESS COULD FLOWER WITHIN THE GREAT ORDER.
ELAINE, I THOUGHT THAT ONE OF MY SONS WOULD STAND IN YOUR PLACE. YOUR FATHER, MOST LIKELY.
AND IN LILITH'S STEAD I EXPECTED FENRIS. BUT FENRIS IS BUSY ELSEWHERE.
BUT WHAT DO YOU WANT US FOR? WHAT CAN WE TELL YOU THAT YOU DON'T ALREADY KNOW?
IT-- IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.
YES, OF COURSE, I KNOW EVERYTHING. BUT OMNISCIENCE IS OBJECTIVE. DISENGAGED.
FOR THIS ONE THING I DECIDED THERE SHOULD BE ADVOCATES, TO PLEAD ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ISSUE.
SHOULD I REPAIR CREATION?
OR DESTROY IT?

THE-- THE WHOLE *UNIVERSE?* DO YOU REALLY MEAN THAT YOU'D--?
DESTROY IT.
HOW CAN YOU EVEN *HESITATE?*
YOU CREATED A COSMOS WHERE *ALL* THINGS LIVE IN PAIN. TORMENTED-- FLAWED-- AFRAID.
WHERE *BEAUTY--* IF IT EXISTS AT ALL-- IS AN OCCASIONAL *ACCIDENT.*
I WANTED THE *SELF-AWARE* TO DISCOVER OR CREATE THAT BEAUTY FOR *THEMSELVES.*
AND SO THEY *DO.* THEN THEY WAGE *WARS* ABOUT ITS MEANING, *KILL* EACH OTHER TO POSSESS IT, OR DESTROY IT BECAUSE IT *FRIGHTENS* THEM.
IN ANY CASE, IT NEVER *LASTS.*
TO BE CONSCIOUS AT ALL IS TO BE CONSCIOUS OF YOUR OWN *INCOMPLETENESS.* YOUR OWN *ISOLATION.*
THAT'S NOT--
BE *SILENT,* CHILD. THE *PROSECUTION* SPEAKS FIRST.
THIS *BAUBLE* OF YOURS--SO PERFECT AND SO *PRETTY* SEEN FROM WITHOUT-- IS FROM INSIDE AT BEST A PRISON, AT WORST A *CHARNEL* HOUSE FOR ALL SOULS PENT WITHIN IT.
BURN IT. GIVE THOSE YOU'VE MADE ONE LAST AND PERFECT *BLESSING.*
HMM. AS AN OPENING STATEMENT, *EMOTIONAL* BUT NOT WITHOUT FORCE.
NOW, ELAINE--

MORNINGSTAR--
"--IT'S YOUR TURN."
--I HAVE SO MANY REASONS TO LOVE YOU.
CHOOM
FOR EONS I'VE DINED RICHLY-- GLUTTED MYSELF FULL-- ON THE CRUMBS YOU LET FALL FROM YOUR TABLE.
WHEN YOU TAUGHT PRIDE AND HATRED TO THE ANGELS.
WHEN YOU DIVIDED HEAVEN AGAINST ITSELF.
WHEN YOU UNMADE THE MANSIONS OF THE SILENCE WITH YOUR FOOTFALLS.

YOUR EVERY ACTION-- YOUR EVERY *ASPIRATION*-- HAS MADE ME *STRONGER*.
AND HERE WE *STAND* AT LAST, AT THE END OF ALL *THINGS*.
THE *TEACHER*--
--AND THE *PUPIL*.
FENRIS--
--YOU HAVEN'T LEARNED ANY *NEW* TRICKS SINCE THE START OF TIME.
I SERIOUSLY DOUBT YOU'D BE *CAPABLE* OF IT.
IT'S VERY MUCH A MATTER OF--
--*FLEXIBILITY*.

BUT--
BUT--
YOU WERE *POWERLESS!* WHEN I *ATTACKED* YOU IN THE HOGAN--
--WHEN FENRIS THREW HIS *SPEAR*--
I *RESERVED* MY POWER. THOSE WEREN'T *LIFE-OR-DEATH* SITUATIONS. NOT QUITE.
AT *SOME* POINT, I KNEW, I'D BE INSIDE FENRIS'S GUARD. I'D HAVE *HATED* TO TURN UP EMPTY-HANDED.
AND NOW IT SEEMS I'M *RELEASED* FROM MY PROMISE TO YOUR *FATHER*.
NO! NO!
BY *ANY* DEFINITION, YOU HAVE RAISED YOUR *HAND* AGAINST ME.
MORNINGSTAR, PL-*PLEASE* DON'T KILL ME. I'VE ONLY JUST BEEN *BORN!*
I'LL DO ANYTHING-- MAKE *ANY* ATONEMENT! PLEASE!
I'M NOT *INTERESTED* IN YOUR LIFE OR DEATH, CHILD.
BUT I DO NEED TO SEND A *MESSAGE*.

NO. I *WON'T.*
I WON'T *DO* IT.
THEN THE PROSECUTION WINS BY **DEFAULT.**
I DON'T *CARE.* ALL OF THIS IS-- *OBSCENE.* HORRIBLE.
YOU CAN'T *ASK* ME TO SPEAK FOR ALL THESE LIVES. YOU CAN'T ASK *ANYBODY!*
EITHER YOU *CARE* ABOUT YOUR OWN CREATION OR YOU *DON'T.*
AND IF YOU DON'T, THEN I CAN'T *MAKE* YOU.
EXCELLENT! A *VERDICT,* YAHWEH. GIVE US A *VERDICT.*
BUT THIS MUCH I *WILL* SAY. IF YOU DECIDE TO DESTROY EVERYTHING, THEN I'LL *FIGHT* YOU.
UNTIL I *DIE.*
BUT IF I DECIDE-- THEN **YOU'LL** BE AMONG THE THINGS THAT CEASE TO **BE.**
THERE WILL **BE** NO FIGHT. THERE **CANNOT** BE.

HOW CAN YOU *SAY* THAT SO CALMLY?
HOW CAN YOU TALK ABOUT-- ABOUT UNCOUNTABLE *DEATHS* AS IF THEY DON'T MATTER?
NO. THAT IS NOT THE *WAY* OF IT.
ANY DECISION I MAKE WILL BE *AB AETERNO--* FROM THE BEGINNING OF *TIME.*
NOTHING WILL *DIE,* BECAUSE NOTHING WILL EVER HAVE *BEEN.*
THERE'LL STILL BE *NOTHING* WHEN THERE COULD HAVE BEEN *SOMETHING.*
YOU'LL STILL HAVE *ENDED* ALL THOSE POSSIBILITIES. YOU CAN'T *PRETEND* THAT--
GREETINGS, YAHWEH. I BEAR A *MESSAGE* FROM YOUR SON, LUCIFER.
WILL YOU ALLOW ME TO *DELIVER* IT?

LITTLE POPPET, I DECREED THAT ONE VOICE WOULD SPEAK FOR **DISSOLUTION,** AND ONE FOR **RENEWAL.**
I WILL HEAR NO **OTHER** VOICES.
BUT LUCIFER SENDS NO **PETITION,** LORD OF HOSTS.
ONLY **THIS.**
HE SAID YOU WOULD **UNDERSTAND** HIS MEANING.
AH. YES, YES, I **SEE.**
HERE ARE THE **FRUITS** OF RANDOMNESS. THE HARVEST OF **UNCERTAINTY.**
HE'S **RIGHT,** OF COURSE. THERE **IS** ANOTHER WAY. AND THE PAIN CAN BE **JUSTIFIED,** ELAINE--
--IF ONLY BY REFERENCE TO THE **GREATER** GOOD.

ELAINE:
HE BALANCES THE *DAGGER* IN HIS PALM.
SEEMS TO TEST ITS *WEIGHT* AGAINST THE WEIGHT OF *CREATION,* WHICH HE HOLDS IN HIS *OTHER* HAND.
AND THEN HE HOLDS IT OUT TO *SHOW* US.
LILITH. ELAINE. CAN YOU **EXPOUND** THIS RIDDLE FOR ME? WHAT DO YOU THINK IT **MEANS?**
RIDDLE? IT'S *OBVIOUS.*
IT MEANS THAT *LUCIFER* CASTS HIS LOT WITH *ME.* FOR DESTRUCTION.
HE'S TELLING YOU TO *END* THIS. TO END *EVERYTHING.*
I DON'T *THINK* SO.
I THINK IT'S A *WARNING.* IF YOU DESTROY THE TWO CREATIONS, OR LET THEM DIE, LUCIFER WILL *PURSUE* YOU.
AND TAKE HIS *REVENGE.*
HE *SMILES* LIKE AN INDULGENT SCHOOLMASTER.
THE LAST TIME I **COUNTED** THERE WERE **THREE** CREATIONS.
AND I KNOW *THEN* THAT I'M *WRONG.*

MORNINGSTAR

PART 6 OF 6

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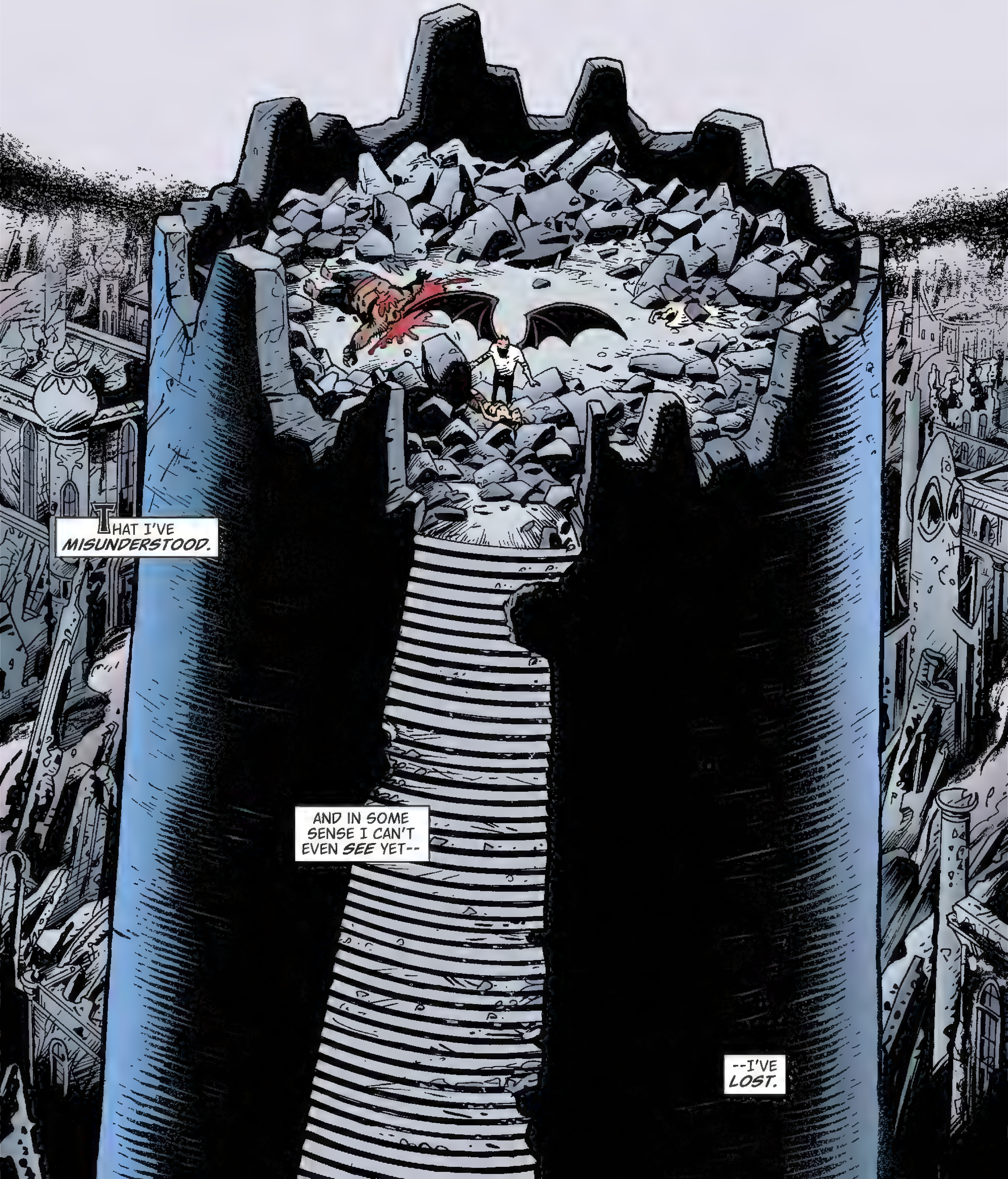

THAT I'VE *MISUNDERSTOOD.*
AND IN SOME SENSE I CAN'T EVEN *SEE* YET--
--I'VE *LOST.*

IS THERE TENDERNESS IN LUCIFER'S TOUCH? ONLY A FOOL WOULD TRY TO READ HIS FEELINGS IN HIS FACE.
BUT THEN-- ONLY A FOOL WOULD UNDERESTIMATE WHAT HE'S CAPABLE OF.
THE-- KKH!--
--THE WOLF IS--
FENRIS IS DEAD. NOEMA FLED. WE'VE SURVIVED, MAZIKEEN, AND WE'VE TAUGHT OUR ENEMIES HUMILITY.
NOT A BAD OUTCOME, AS FAR AS THAT GOES.
WELL THAT'S ANOTHER MATTER, DUMA.
BUT AT LEAST IF SHE FAILS WE'LL NEVER KNOW ABOUT IT.

NO. BOTH OF THOSE ARE **POSSIBLE** CONSTRUCTIONS, ELAINE.
BUT BOTH ARE **WRONG.**
TELL THEM.
ME?
BUT YOU SAID YOU'D ALLOW NO OTHER **VOICES.**
ALL RULES MAY BE **BROKEN** AT LEAST ONCE.
ASK MY **SON,** LUCIFER.
IN ANCIENT **PHRYGIA,** IN A TEMPLE IN TELMISSUS, THERE WAS A GREAT **WONDER.**
THE **REINS** OF A CART, TWISTED BY THE DEAD KING GORDIUS, INTO A **KNOT** THAT NOBODY COULD UNTIE.
THE REINS WERE MADE OF CORNEL BARK, WHICH HAD SHRUNK AND COMPACTED OVER THE YEARS. AND THEY WERE TIED IN WHAT'S CALLED A TURKISH KNOT, WITH NO VISIBLE ENDS.
HUNDREDS OF MEN HAD TRIED AND **FAILED** TO LOOSEN IT.

"IN 333 B.C., ***ALEXANDER*** OF MACEDON CAME TO TELMISSUS AT THE HEAD OF A HUGE ***ARMY.***
"HE HAD HEARD A ***LEGEND*** THAT WHOEVER UNTIED GORDIUS'S KNOT WOULD GO ON TO ***CONQUER*** ALL OF ASIA.
"THE PEOPLE OF THE TOWN CAME RUNNING ALONG ***AFTER*** HIM.
"THEY ***KNEW*** WHO THIS WAS: KING PHILIP'S FAVORED SON. AT 23, ***UNDEFEATED*** IN BATTLE AND ALREADY CALLED 'THE GREAT'.
"HE STOOD BEFORE THE KNOT, AND ***SAW*** AT ONCE THAT IT COULD NOT BE ***LOOSENED.***
"HE'D LOSE FACE EVEN TO ***TRY.*** THE BARK HAD ***FUSED*** INTO A HARD, COHESIVE MASS INTO WHICH NO FINGERTIP COULD BE ***PRIED.***
"SO HE ***CUT*** IT OPEN WITH A SINGLE ***STROKE.***
"THEN WENT ON TO ***TARSUS*** AND GAUGAMELA, SWEEPING ***ALL*** BEFORE HIM."
CONTEMPORARY SOURCES, BY THE WAY, ARE MOSTLY ***SILENT*** ON THIS.
ONLY ***ARISTOBOULOS*** EVEN MENTIONS IT-- AND HE WAS ALEXANDER'S GREATEST ***PROPAGANDIST.***

WHAT DOES THAT STORY HAVE TO DO WITH *US?*
I DON'T *KNOW.* I'M ONLY A *RAG* DOLL.
IT'S JUST A *METAPHOR,* LILITH.
GO *ON.*
YOU'VE BEEN TRYING TO DECIDE WHETHER TO *REPAIR* CREATION OR TO *END* IT.
LUCIFER IS TELLING YOU THERE'S *ANOTHER* SOLUTION-- A WAY OF *CUTTING* THE KNOT.
I GET TOO CLOSE TO THINGS. I SUPPOSE THAT'S IN THE NATURE OF THE JOB.
AFTER ALL, I'VE DEFINED WITH MY OWN WILL EVERY VARIABLE-- EVERY PHYSICAL LAW. EVERYTHING HAPPENS BECAUSE I MAKE IT HAPPEN.
I'VE DONE IT *MYSELF.*
I KNOW HOW *HARD* IT IS.
AND THE HARDEST THING OF *ALL?* YOU KNOW *THAT,* TOO.
TO *DO* NOTHING.
TO DO *NOTHING?*

TO CUT THE KNOT IS TO ALLOW THE SITUATION TO FIND ITS OWN RESOLUTION. ALLOW EVENTS TO-- PLAY OUT.
BLESS HIM. HE KNOWS HOW ALIEN THAT IS TO MY TEMPERAMENT.
I GIVE YOU MY FELICITATIONS, ELAINE. AND I GIVE YOU THIS.
WH-WHAT--?
YOUR OWN ACTIONS WILL DETERMINE WHETHER YOU TURN INTO ME, OR INTO SOMETHING ELSE.
NO! WHY HER? WHY NOT ME?
BECAUSE THE SCALES ARE ALREADY TILTED TOWARDS DESTRUCTION.
BECAUSE SHE TOOK THIS ON HERSELF WHEN SHE SAT ON THE THRONE.
AND BECAUSE YOU DIED, ON ARMAGEDDON PLAIN.
A DEBT WHICH NOW FALLS DUE.
I CAN'T LET GO OF IT.
IT'S STICKING TO MY HANDS.
DON'T BE AFRAID. IT'S ONLY ANOTHER METAPHOR.
IT SIGNIFIES YOUR NEW RESPONSIBILITIES.
CREATION-- BOTH CREATIONS-- LOOK TO YOU NOW.
TO CUT THE KNOT.

UFF!
SO MY MESSAGE GOT *THROUGH.* GOOD.
GOOD?
HOW IS THIS *GOOD?*

HE SAID IT WAS UP TO *ME.*
HE SAID *BOTH* CREATIONS WILL WIND DOWN TO *NOTHING* IF I DON'T--
...
BUT THERE ARE *THREE* CREATIONS.
COUNTING YOUR *OWN,* YES.
HE *REMINDED* ME OF THAT EARLIER.
AND *YAHWEH'S* CREATION WILL FAIL BECAUSE ONLY HIS *NAME* HELD IT TOGETHER.
WHAT ABOUT *YOURS?*
THE BLOOD I SPILLED AT *YGGDRASIL*-- YOUR FATHER'S BLOOD-- EXTENDS THE *DOOM* OF THIS COSMOS TO MY OWN. ALL WILL FALL *TOGETHER.*
OR BE *SAVED* TOGETHER.
THAT'S STILL A *POSSIBILITY,* YES.
DUMA, FIND SOME *ANGELS.* THE FASTEST AND THE STRONGEST YOU *KNOW.*
BRING THEM *HERE,* AS QUICKLY AS YOU CAN.
YOU *KNEW* WHAT I'D HAVE TO DO.
I SUPPOSE I SHOULD *THANK* YOU FOR NOT TELLING ME *SOONER.*

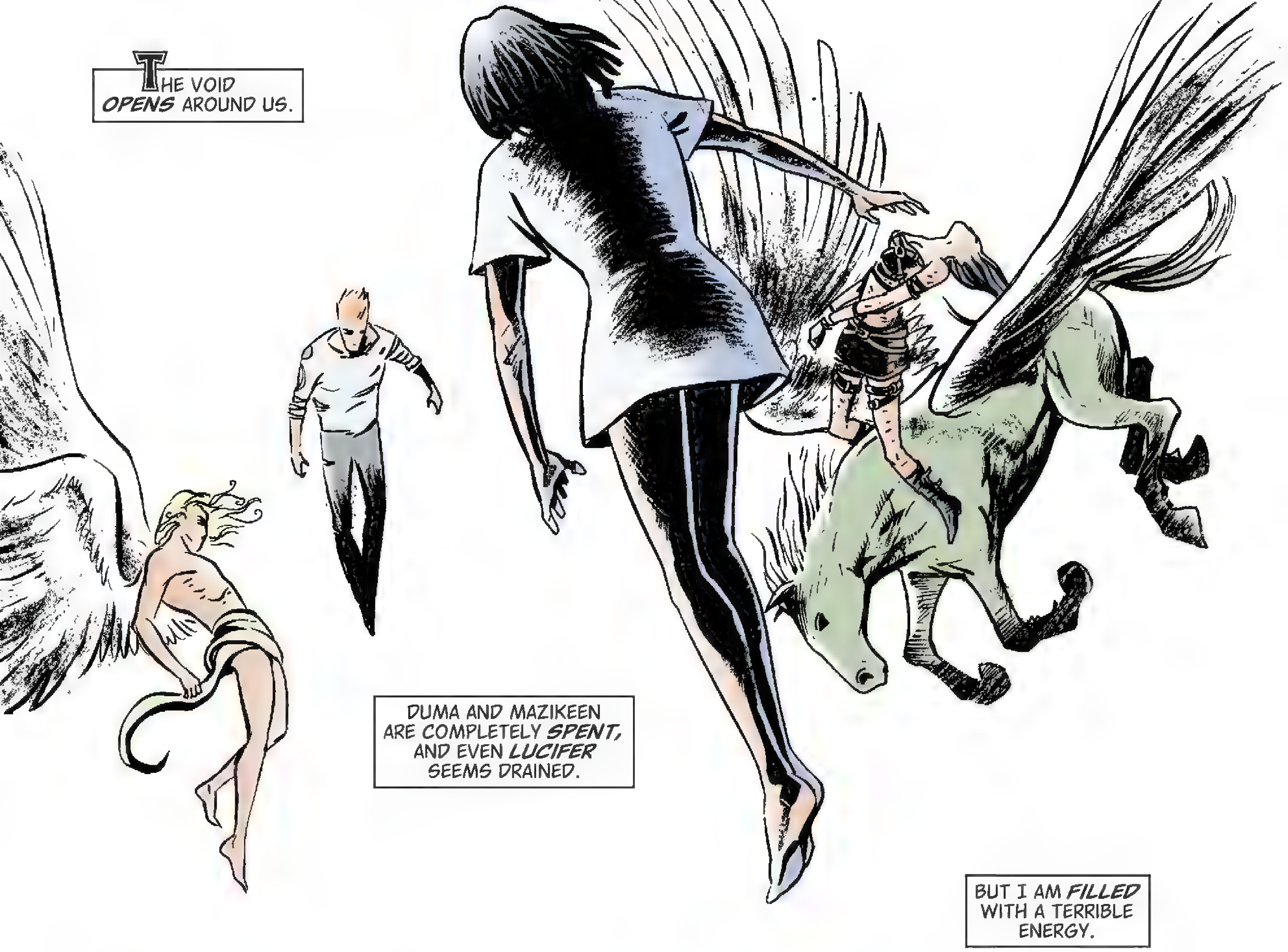
I WAIT, AND THE TIME HANGS ON ME LIKE A BARBED WIRE SHIRT.
WHEN I CAN'T BEAR IT ANY LONGER, I START TO DRAW THE GATEWAYS.
THERE'LL HAVE TO BE TWO OF THEM. SIGNED WITH MY NAME, LIKE THE ONE I MADE BEFORE.
THE YAHWEH DANCE. THIS IS WHY LUCIFER TOOK THE TIME TO MAKE ME LEARN IT.
I TELL THEM WHAT TO DO, WHERE TO FLY.
THEY OBEY ME BECAUSE DUMA DOES-- AND BECAUSE, IN THE END, OBEDIENCE IS WHAT ANGELS ARE BEST AT.
ALL BUT ONE OF THEM, ANYWAY.
AS FAR AS YOU CAN. AS FAST AS YOU CAN.
UNTIL YOU MEET AGAIN ON THE FURTHER SIDE.
NO ANGELS IN YOUR CREATION, THOUGH, LUCIFER.

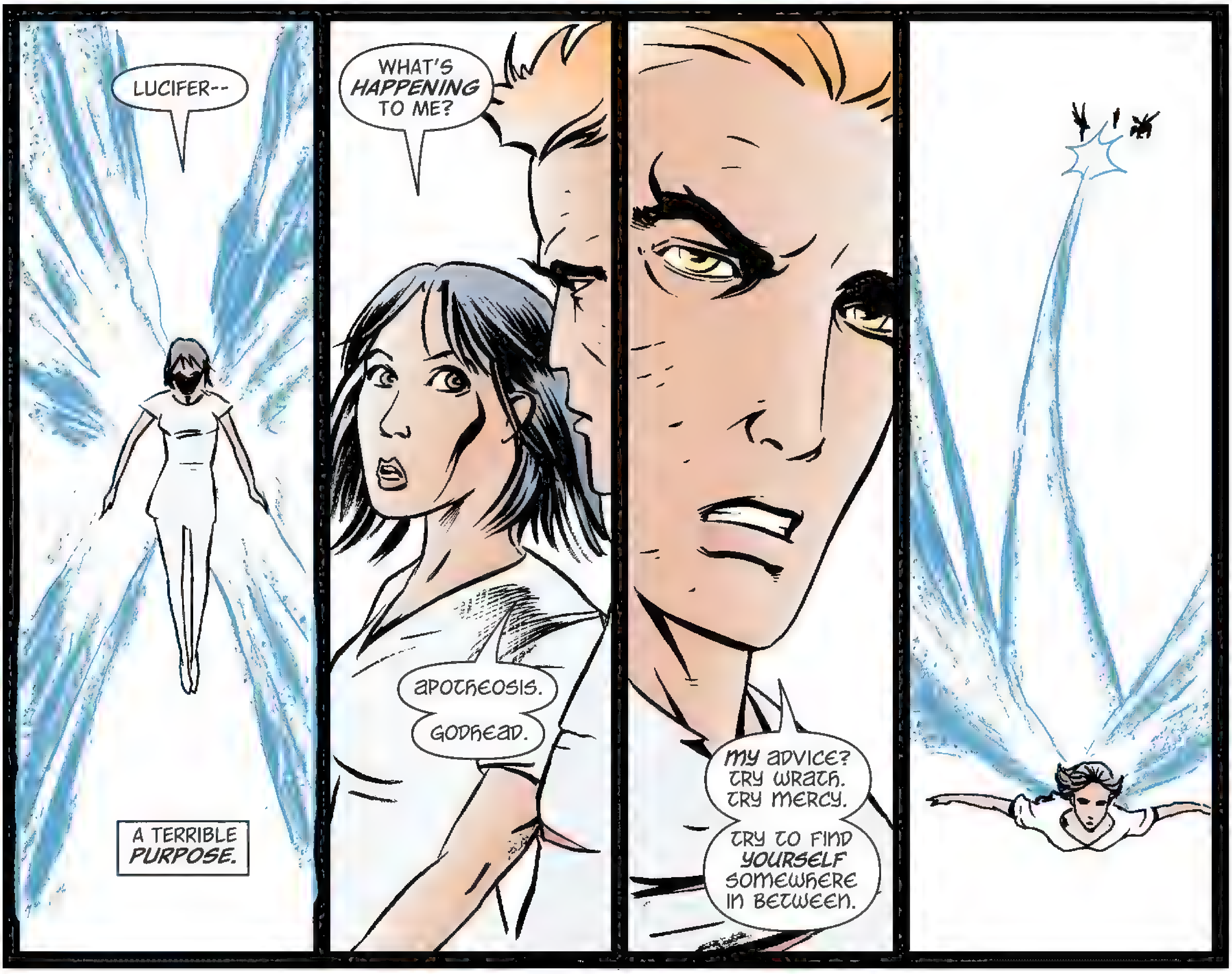
NO IMMORTALS AT *ALL*, ELAINE BELLOC.
AND NO TIME TO *SUMMON* ANY.
THEN WE NEED TO DECIDE WHO--
IF THE FOUR OF *US* CAN'T DO THIS THING, THEN IT CAN'T BE *DONE*.
SAVE TIME BY TAKING OUR *CONSENT* FOR GRANTED.
ALL RIGHT. YOU KNOW THE *RULES*. AND WHERE WE'RE *HEADED*.
I'LL SEE YOU *THERE*.
LUCIFER BACKS *AIR* FOR A MOMENT OR TWO. FIXES ME WITH THAT *STARE* OF HIS.
SAYING NOTHING.
WEIGHING *EVERYTHING*.

BE SURE THAT THIS IS WHAT YOU *WANT.*
THERE'S NO TURNING *BACK* FROM IT.
THERE NEVER *HAS* BEEN. NOT FROM THAT MOMENT WHEN YOU PULLED ME OUT OF SOMEONE ELSE'S *DEATH.*
WHAT I WANT-- DOESN'T *MATTER* NOW.
IT ALWAYS *MATTERS.* EVEN FOR *SUICIDES.*
PACE YOURSELF.
HIS WINGS *FLASH* ONCE, AND HE'S OFF INTO UNREACHABLE *DISTANCE.*
IT DOESN'T COME SO *NATURALLY* TO ME.
I HAVE TO *GATHER* SPEED, GRADUALLY.
MY MIND STILL *BOUND* BY LAWS MY BODY HAS *FORGOTTEN.*

AT FIRST I'M *FLYING* OVER PURELY *PHYSICAL* SPACES.
HUMANS AND *CENTAURS* SEE ME PASS, AND I SUPPOSE WOVE ME INTO THEIR *STORIES.*
THE GIRL HAULING A BLANKET OF *LIGHT* ACROSS THE SKY.
THE GAPS *BETWEEN* THE WORLDS ARE ROUGH GOING, AT FIRST. COLD AND BLEAK, AIRLESS AND *SILENT.*
IT'S HARD TO KEEP TRACK OF *TIME* HERE.
THEY'RE *NOTHING* COMPARED TO THE REALMS BENEATH, THOUGH. LUCIFER NEVER *MADE* AN AFTERLIFE.
INSTEAD, A GREAT PREGNANT *EMPTINESS* PULSES LIKE A HEART, CLAWS AT ME WITH INVISIBLE *FINGERS.*
FROM THERE I FLY ON THROUGH *ABSTRACTIONS* AND ABOMINATIONS.
DIMENSIONS LEFT *INCOMPLETE,* AND THOSE WHERE INITIALLY TINY FLAWS HAVE GROWN *MONSTROUS.*
FORESTS OF *CANCER* BLOSSOMS. OCEANS OF SHATTERED *BONE.*

THE JOURNEY GOES ON FOR SO *LONG* THAT I PASS THROUGH EXHAUSTION INTO A GREY SPACE *BEYOND.*
THE MUSCLES OF MY *HAND* LOCK, AND THE FEELING *DIES.*
MY *NAME* AND MY *PURPOSE* SLIP FROM ME.
I'M SHARPENED TO THE *NUB* OF MY OWN *WILL.*
IN OTHER WORDS--
--I BECOME WHAT *HE* WAS TO START WITH.
AND THEN, ACROSS INFINITE DISTANCE, I SEE *ANOTHER* POINT MOVING LIKE ME.
I WONDER FOR A MOMENT IF IT *IS* ME. IF THE SKY IN FRONT OF ME IS A *MIRROR.*
BUT NO, THERE ARE TWO *MORE.*
FROM PERPENDICULAR *DIRECTIONS* WITHOUT NAMES THEY SPEED *TOWARD* ME.
BUT SLOWING, SLOWING AS THEY COME--
SO THAT WHEN WE *TOUCH,* THERE IS NO JOLT, NO SHOCK.
NOTHING AT *ALL.*


THE VOID *OPENS* AROUND US.
DUMA AND MAZIKEEN ARE COMPLETELY *SPENT,* AND EVEN *LUCIFER* SEEMS DRAINED.
BUT I AM *FILLED* WITH A TERRIBLE ENERGY.


LUCIFER--
A TERRIBLE *PURPOSE.*
WHAT'S *HAPPENING* TO ME?
APOTHEOSIS.
GODHEAD.
MY ADVICE? TRY WRATH. TRY MERCY.
TRY TO FIND *YOURSELF* SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN.

IN MY WRATH, I PURSUE THE CHILD.
SHE HIDES FROM ME. IN THE HEART OF A STAR. IN A GRAIN OF SAND. IN A DERELICT'S DREAM.
BUT I FLUSH HER OUT, AND I CLOSE WITH HER.
HE SENT YOU, DIDN'T HE?
HE SAID HE'D LET ME LIVE, BUT I KNEW IT WAS A LIE.
NOBODY SENT ME. I CAME BECAUSE YOUR GAMES BROUGHT US SO CLOSE TO DISASTER.
I DON'T CARE. I'D DO IT AGAIN.
I'D DO IT AGAIN AND LAUGH.
I KNOW.
AND I CAN'T LET YOU.
AAAAA!

SHE FIGHTS ME.
SHE MIGHT AS WELL TRY TO STAND IN A HURRICANE.
I CARRY HER BACK THROUGH THE STATIONS OF HER LIFE, AND PRE-LIFE.
I CHANGE NOTHING THAT WAS HER, BUT I REMOVE TWO THINGS-- THE CORROSIVE POWER, AND THE MEMORIES OF A LIFE SHE WON'T NOW LIVE.
I FIND HER MOTHER, JILL PRESTO, LEFT TO HER OWN DEVICES IN THE ANGELS' TOWER, IN HELL.
I CUT AROUND HER, WITHOUT TOUCHING HER--
--AND PASTE HER INTO MANHATTAN.
SHE ENDURED A RAPE, BUT NOW SHE REMEMBERS A LOVE AFFAIR: SPLENDID, PYROTECHNIC, BUT DOOMED.
SHE WONDERS WHAT BEING A SINGLE MOTHER WILL BE LIKE. HOW SOON SHE CAN GO BACK TO SINGING.
AND WHERE IN HELL SHE GOT THE NAME NOEMA FROM.

IN MY *MERCY* I LOOK DOWN ON CHRISTOPHER *RUDD.* BEING DEAD *ALREADY,* HE IS UNABLE TO DIE AGAIN.
SO FENRIS'S FIRE *EATS* AT HIS BODY WITHOUT EVER *CONSUMING* HIM.
I *WHISPER* INTO THE EAR OF AN ANGEL WHO I KNOW TO BE *RELIABLE.*
I SEND HIM ON AN *ERRAND.*
THERE'S SOMEONE *GAUDIUM* TOLD ME ABOUT. SOMEONE WHO CAN *HELP* HERE.
I KNOW THAT MELEOS WILL *FIND* HIM, IF ANYBODY CAN.
WHY HAVE YOU *BROUGHT* ME HERE?
TO *JUDGE,* SOLOMON. WHY ELSE?
THIS MAN IS CHRISTOPHER *RUDD.*
SENT TO *HELL* FOR THE MURDER OF A CHILD, HE ROSE TO BECOME HELL'S *KING.*
AND THEN TOOK THOSE *WOUNDS* IN DEFENDING THE THRONE OF HEAVEN AGAINST *FENRIS,* THE WOLF.

I SEE YOUR SINS. BOTH BEFORE YOUR DEATH AND AFTER.
THEY ARE GREAT ALMOST BEYOND MEASURE.
BUT YOU HAVE PURGED THEM ALL. WHATEVER YOU ONCE WERE, CHRISTOPHER RUDD--
--YOU ARE TRULY INNOCENT NOW.
AA
AA
AA
AA
AA
THIS IS HEAVEN?
IN A SENSE.
THEN TAKE ME BACK. I HAVEN'T EARNED IT YET.

THESE THINGS DONE, I LOOK FOR *LUCIFER* AGAIN.
AND *FIND* HIM, AT LAST, WHERE I LEAST *EXPECTED.*
THE *HELLKIN* AND THE *HEAVEN-HOST?* TOGETHER?
LOOK *AGAIN.*
RUDD'S ARMY OF THE *DAMNED* ARE IN THERE TOO.
THEY WANT TO *KNOW* WHAT YOU DID. AND WHERE THEY *STAND.*
THE *TRUTH* IS ALWAYS AN OPTION.
THE TRUTH IS *FINE.*
THE *CRISIS* IS OVER. THE WORST HAS BEEN *AVERTED.*
AND ALL THAT WAS *HARMED* WILL SOON BEGIN TO *HEAL.*

BUT THINGS WON'T BE THE SAME AS BEFORE.
BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT WHERE YOU THINK YOU ARE.
WE OPENED TWO GATES-- OPENED THEM WIDE ENOUGH TO DROP BOTH YAHWEH'S COSMOS AND LUCIFER'S INTO MINE.
THERE'S ONLY ONE CREATION NOW, WHERE THERE USED TO BE THREE.
and in *this* creation, it's not my *father's* name that binds all things together.
it's *hers.* you're looking at your new god.
THIS IS WHAT YOU *MEANT,* ISN'T IT?
WHEN YOU SAID I'D BE *IMPRISONED?*
I imagine she'll have some announcements soon about heaven, hell, and matters arising.
until then, you're free to do what you like.
yes. this is what I meant.
someone has to be the founder. the preserver. the arbiter. and I was damned if it was going to be me.
FOR what it's worth, I think you'll be an improvement on the old regime.

THERE'S A LOT OF SHOUTING. A LOT OF WEEPING AND CHEERING AND CURSING.
I TURN MY BACK ON IT.
A LITTLE EFFORT-- SO LITTLE-- AND MY AWARENESS SLIDES OUT THROUGH MY SKIN.
EXPANDS TO FILL THE SPACE WHICH NOW IS MINE. WHICH MIGHT AS WELL BE ME.
ON EARTH, THE PROCESSES OF LIFE RESUME.
FLOWERS GROW. RAIN FALLS. PEOPLE LIVE, AND DIE.
THE ENTIRE SYSTEM MAINTAINED AND GUARANTEED BY A SINGLE WILL.
MINE.
IN A ROOM IN A HOUSE IN ANTWERP, SAY, OR CAPETOWN, OR NEW YORK, A CHILD WAKES FROM SLEEP, CRYING.
THE TEAR COURSING DOWN HER CHEEK IS LIKE A MINIATURE WORLD, PROFOUND AND CRYSTALLINE AND PERFECT.
I AM LOST IN IT.

Kaluta 05

IN RIVER HOLT ON THE THIRD DAY AFTER SUMMER SOLSTICE, THEY HOLD THE PARLEY-- A CONTEST OF STORYTELLERS WITH A GOLDEN TRENCHER AS THE PRIZE.
I ALWAYS GO TO LISTEN.
THIS YEAR I PLUCKED UP MY COURAGE AT LAST, AND WENT TO COMPETE.
ENTRANTS
HUMAN TELLERS ARE WELCOME, IF THEY WEAR THE HORSEHAIR BRAID. BUT-- YOU'RE MALE.
SO ARE YOU.
I'M NOT IN THE CONTEST.
ENTRANTS
DOES RULE OR PRECEDENT SAY A MAN MAY NOT TAKE PART?
NO, OF COURSE NOT. THEY JUST-- DON'T.
THEN I'LL BE A NOVELTY ACT. PUT ME DOWN AS MARTIN THOLE'S SON. THANK YOU.
I TOOK A SEAT NEAR THE BACK OF THE STADIUM.
I WAS CONTENT TO BE ANONYMOUS UNTIL MY TURN CAME.
TWO HUMAN GIRLS SAT JUST ACROSS FROM ME. THEY WERE BOTH VERY BEAUTIFUL.
AND ONE WAS STRANGELY FAMILIAR.
BUT THAT MYSTERY WOULD HAVE TO WAIT. JUST THEN PAU-AMSO STEPPED FORWARD, TO LOUD APPLAUSE.
SHE WAS LAST YEAR'S WINNER, AND NOW SHE WAS THE MARK I HAD TO BEAT.

LIES, AND THE ***COST*** OF LIES, ARE THIS TALE'S ***BURDEN.***
MAY MY WORDS ***BLESS*** THE HONEST CARLS WHO ***HEAR*** THEM.
LONG AND LONG AGO, THERE CAME A TIME WE CALL THE ***FADING.*** WHEN MANY DIED, AND MANY OF THOSE WHO LIVED LOST THE ***SAVOR*** OF LIFE.
BUT THEN ***ELAINE*** SAVED US, AND JOY AND PURPOSE ***RETURNED.***
"FOR ***SKALD*** OF FIVE OAKS, JOY AND PURPOSE WENT ALWAYS ***TOGETHER.***
"HE WAS A ***FLETCHER,*** BUT THE BOW WAS HIS ***LOVE*** AS WELL AS HIS LIVELIHOOD.
"HE NEVER ***MISSED*** A TOURNEY OR A FAIR, AND WHEREVER HE SHOT HE WON THE ***GARLAND.***
"HIS ARROWS STOOPED LIKE ***HAWKS,*** UNERRING, WHEN THEY LEFT HIS ***BOW.***
"BUT THEN HIS WIFE, PELLA-COY, FELL ***PREGNANT.*** AND SINCE IT WAS HER FIRST TIME SHE ASKED HIM TO ***STAY*** WITH HER.
"EVEN WHEN NEIGHBORING ***HAKONWY*** HOSTED THE SPRING TOURNEY."

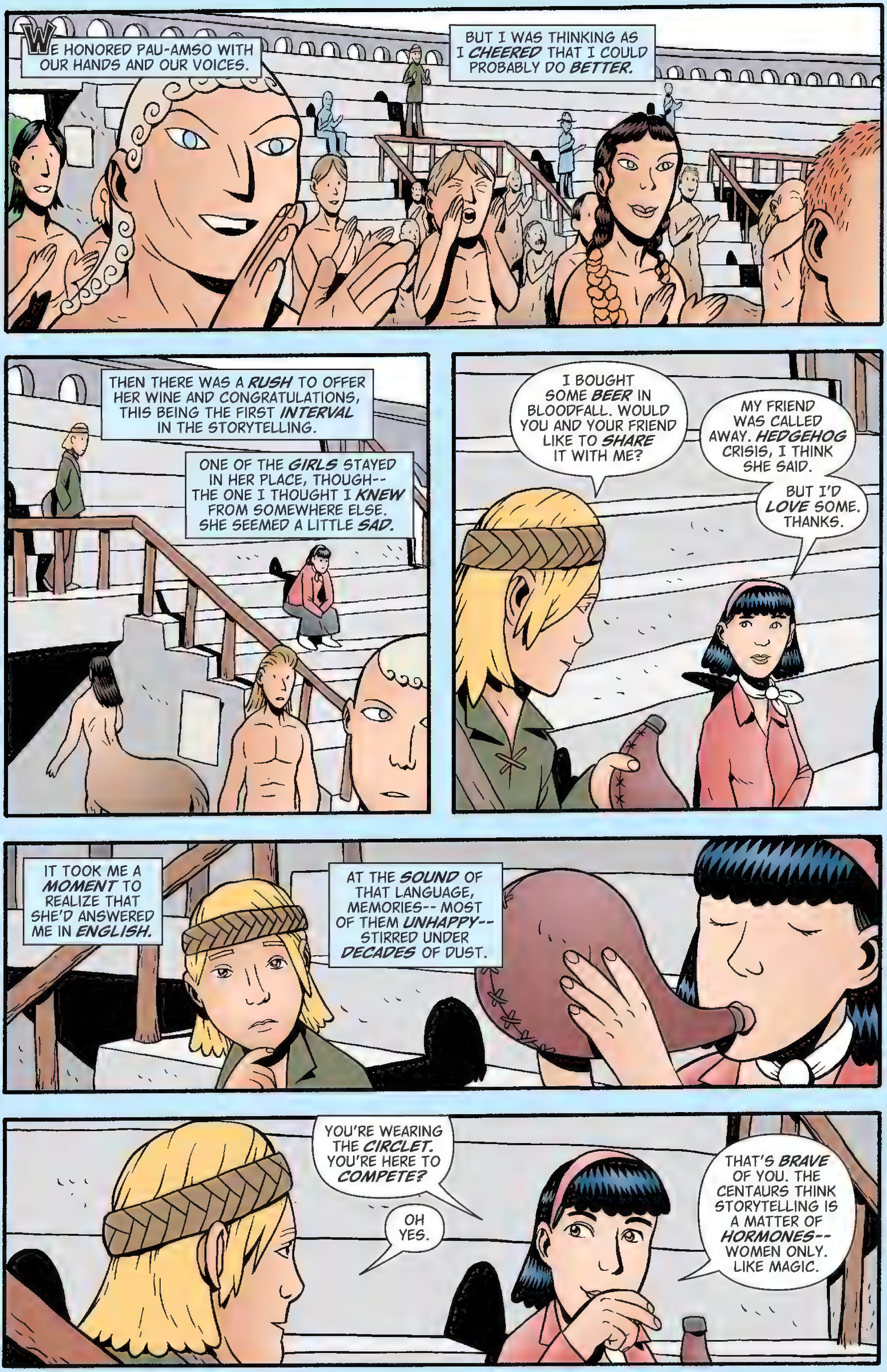
"AND SO HE PROMISED, BUT THE PROMISE CAME BACK INTO HIS *THROAT* WHEN HE SAW THE YOUNG STALLIONS SETTING OFF FOR THE *FAIR.*
"WHY, HIS WIFE MIGHT GO ANOTHER *WEEK* BEFORE SHE DROPPED. IN SUCH A CASE, A LITTLE *LIE* SEEMED SCARCELY A SIN.
THEL COPE'S *WAGON* SNAPPED AN AXLE.
"HE TOLD HER.
HE NEEDS MY *HELP,* OR HE'LL NOT GET HIS *ONIONS* TO MARKET.
"THEN OFF HE WENT AT A *GALLOP,* BECAUSE THE LISTS WOULD BE DRAWN UP AT *NOON* AND THE MORNING WAS FAR ALONG.
"BUT OF COURSE, ON THE MAIN ROAD TO HAKONWY HE WAS *SURE* TO MEET SOMEONE HE *KNEW."*
GOOD *MORROW* TO YE, SKALD.
WILL YOU HELP ME FIX THIS *WALL?*
AH, I'VE A *SPLINTER* IN MY HAND THAT'S NEAR TO *CRIPPLED* ME.
I'M ON MY WAY TO THE *DOCTOR* AT HAKONWY, AND I CAN'T KEEP HER *WAITING.*
HAKONWY SPRING TOURNEY

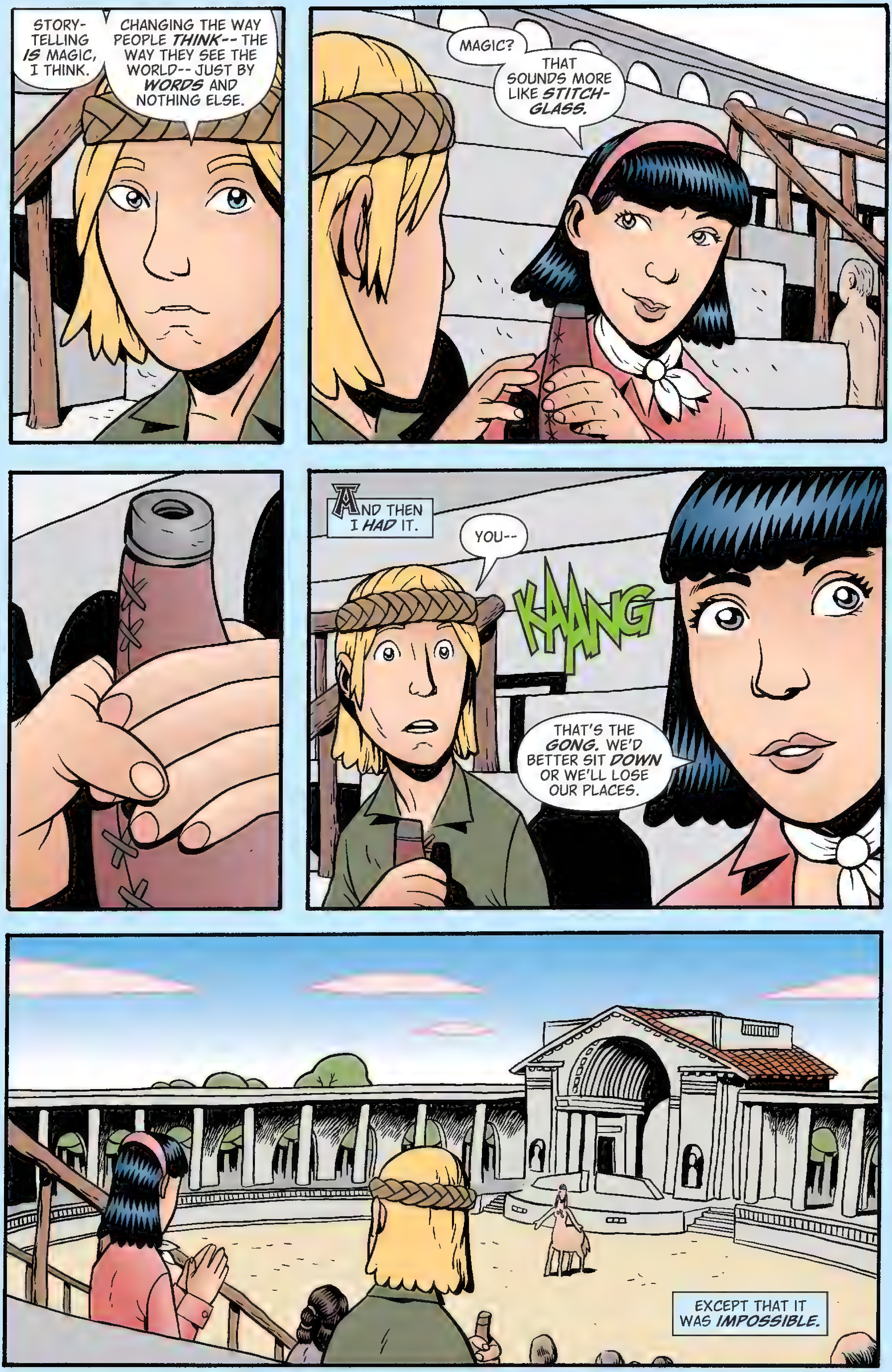
HEY. IT'S SKALD. WE'VE *NO* CHANCE NOW, BROTHERS!
BUT ISN'T YOUR LADY AS FULL AS A *NUT* AND READY TO *CRACK?*
YOU SHOULD BE *WITH* HER, MAN. IT'S YOUR FIRST *CHILD.*
"SKALD'S ANGER FLARED, AND HE SPOKE THE FIRST WORDS THAT CAME TO HIM.
THE CHILD WAS BORN *DEAD.* NOW GIVE ME SOME *PEACE.*
I CAME TO SHOOT IN THE TOURNEY, NOT TO *GAB* WITH PISSPOTS.
"THEY LEFT HIM *ALONE* AFTER THAT, AND HE HAD HIS *TURN.*
"HE DID *WELL,* AND TOOK THE FIRST TWO ROUNDS WITHOUT *TRYING.* HE'D MET NO ONE YET OF HIS OWN *STANDARD.*
"BUT ONE ARCHER STOOD OUT FROM THE REST. A PINK-EYED *STRANGER* WITH WHITE HAIR AND FLANKS, WHOSE BOW WAS MADE OF *ASH* WOOD.
"HIS EYE WAS *KEEN,* AND HIS ARROWS FLEW AS STRAIGHT AND SILENT AS A *SHADOW* FALLS.
"IT'S *HIM* I'LL END UP FACING, SKALD THOUGHT.
"FOR THERE'S NONE *ELSE* HERE GOOD ENOUGH TO *GRIEVE ME.*
"THE *TARGETS* WERE SET BACK TO TWO AND THEN THREE TIMES THE *DISTANCE.*
"THE *WEAK* WERE WHITTLED AWAY, UNTIL FINALLY ONLY SKALD AND THE *STRANGER* WERE LEFT."

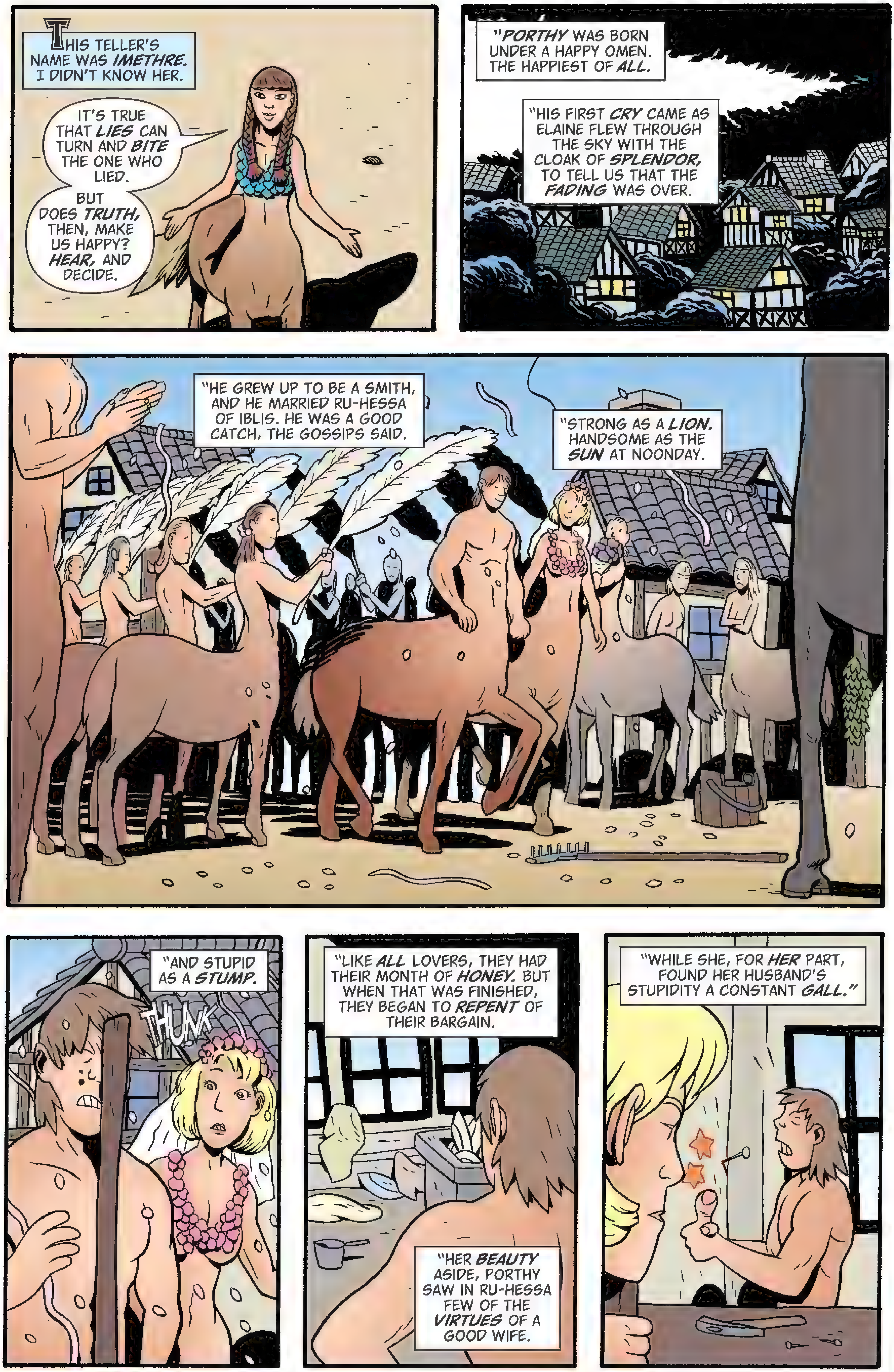
A PURSE OF ***SILVER*** ON THE SIDE WOULD SWEETEN THE ***WAGER.*** WHAT SAY YOU, FLETCHER SKALD?
WELL ENOUGH. BUT I'VE NO SILVER ***WITH*** ME.
IF I ***LOST,*** I'D HAVE TO PAY YOU LATER.
BUT YOU'RE A MAN OF YOUR ***WORD.*** AND IF YOU ***SAY*** A THING IS SO, IT'S SO.
AYE. OF COURSE.
THEN IT'S MY ***SILVER*** AGAINST YOUR ***WORD,*** AND WE'RE AGREED.
"THIS BEING THE ***FINAL,*** THEY WOULD SHOOT ***THREE*** ARROWS EACH.
"THEY STOOD SIDE BY SIDE, AND THEY DREW THEIR ***YARDS.***
"SKALD SHOT ***TRUE*** INTO THE BULL, JUST LEFT OF CENTER.
"BUT THE STRANGER'S SHOT BURIED ITSELF IN THE ***HEART*** OF THE BULL.
"JUST THEN THERE WAS A ***COMMOTION*** ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GROUND. SOME CARTER'S ***WAGON*** LOST ITS AXLE AND HIS WARES SPILLED ON THE GROUND.
"IT WAS A MAN OF ***FIVE OAKS*** WHO SKALD KNEW QUITE WELL.
"HIS NAME WAS ***THEL COPE."***

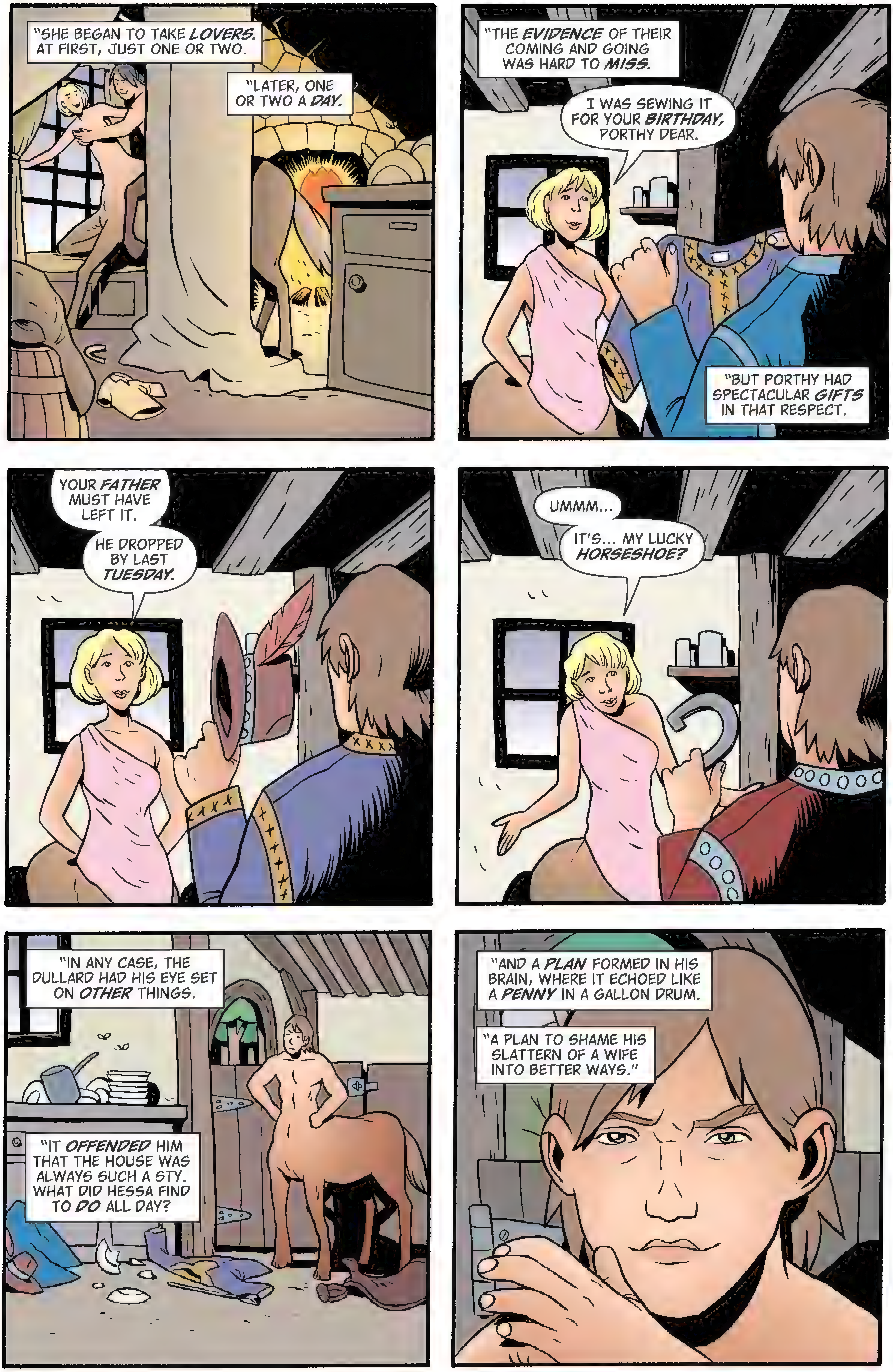
SECOND TARGET!
DRAW YOUR YARDS!
"PERHAPS SKALD'S MIND WASN'T WHERE IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN.
"HIS SECOND SHOT WENT WIDE, WHILE THE STRANGER SHOT AS TRUE AS HE HAD BEFORE.
"THEN A SUDDEN PAIN MADE SKALD LOOK DOWN AT HIS HAND.
"A SPLINTER FROM THE ARROW HAD BITTEN INTO HIS PALM.
A LIE IS A CRACK IN A MAN'S HEART.
AND IT'S THROUGH SUCH CRACKS THAT I CLIMB UP INTO THE LIGHT.
"WITH A CRIPPLED HAND, THERE WAS NO WAY SKALD COULD HOPE TO HIT THE BALE NOW.
"BUT THERE WAS A TARGET THAT WAS NEARER TO HAND."

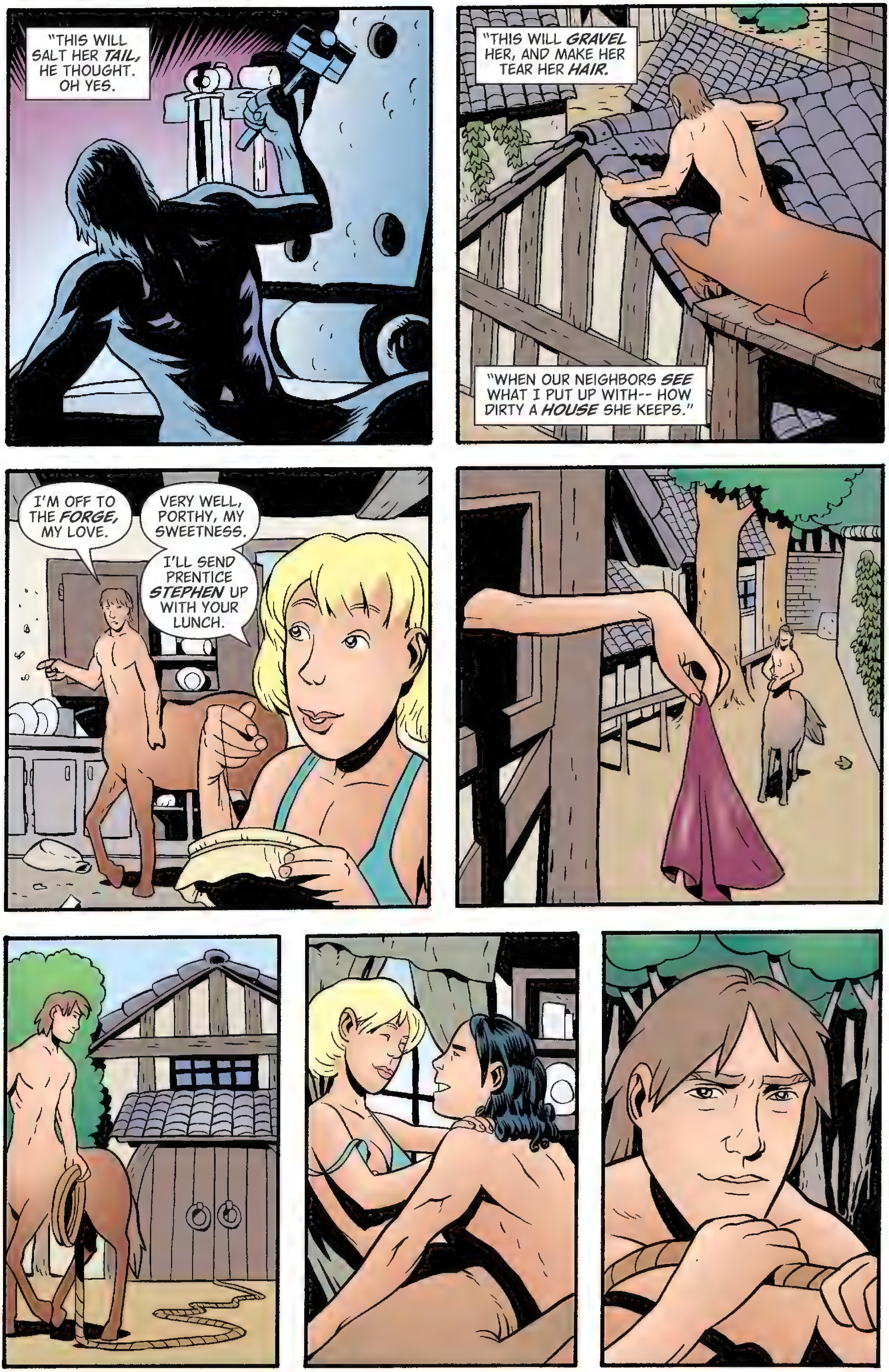
THWUK
THAT COUNTS AS A *MISS,* I BELIEVE.
MY TURN NOW.
"SKALD NEVER WENT *HOME* THAT NIGHT. OR *ANY* NIGHT. HE TOOK SHIP AT REDSCAR WITH A *WHALING* FLEET.
"SO WHETHER HIS *WORD* WAS GOOD OR BAD--
"--HE NEVER GOT TO *HEAR.*"

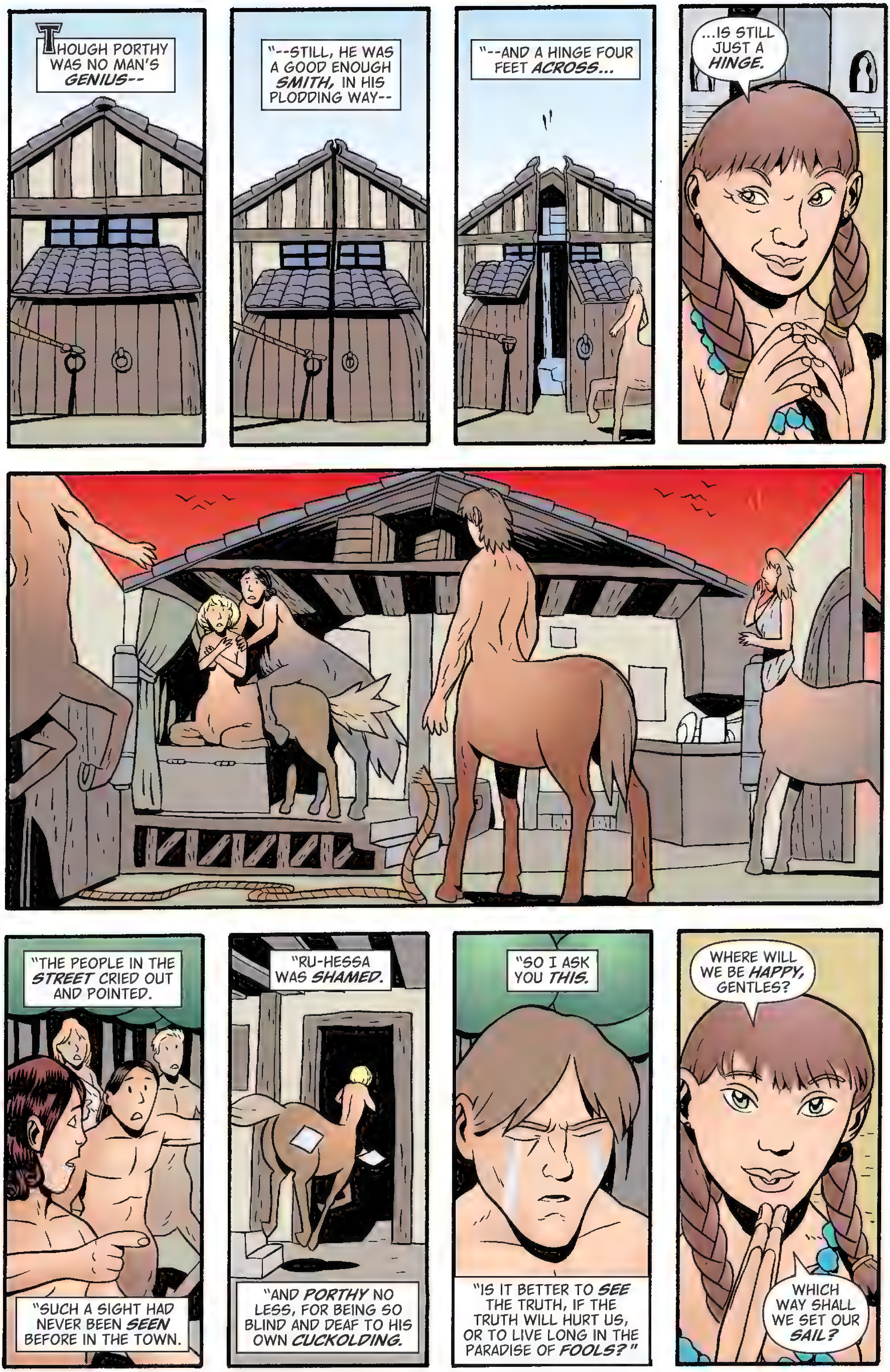

WE HONORED PAU-AMSO WITH OUR HANDS AND OUR VOICES.
BUT I WAS THINKING AS I *CHEERED* THAT I COULD PROBABLY DO *BETTER.*
THEN THERE WAS A *RUSH* TO OFFER HER WINE AND CONGRATULATIONS, THIS BEING THE FIRST *INTERVAL* IN THE STORYTELLING.
ONE OF THE *GIRLS* STAYED IN HER PLACE, THOUGH-- THE ONE I THOUGHT I *KNEW* FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE. SHE SEEMED A LITTLE *SAD.*
I BOUGHT SOME *BEER* IN BLOODFALL. WOULD YOU AND YOUR FRIEND LIKE TO *SHARE* IT WITH ME?
MY FRIEND WAS CALLED AWAY. *HEDGEHOG* CRISIS, I THINK SHE SAID.
BUT I'D *LOVE* SOME. THANKS.
IT TOOK ME A *MOMENT* TO REALIZE THAT SHE'D ANSWERED ME IN *ENGLISH.*
AT THE *SOUND* OF THAT LANGUAGE, MEMORIES-- MOST OF THEM *UNHAPPY*-- STIRRED UNDER *DECADES* OF DUST.
YOU'RE WEARING THE *CIRCLET.* YOU'RE HERE TO *COMPETE?*
OH YES.
THAT'S *BRAVE* OF YOU. THE CENTAURS THINK STORYTELLING IS A MATTER OF *HORMONES*-- WOMEN ONLY. LIKE MAGIC.

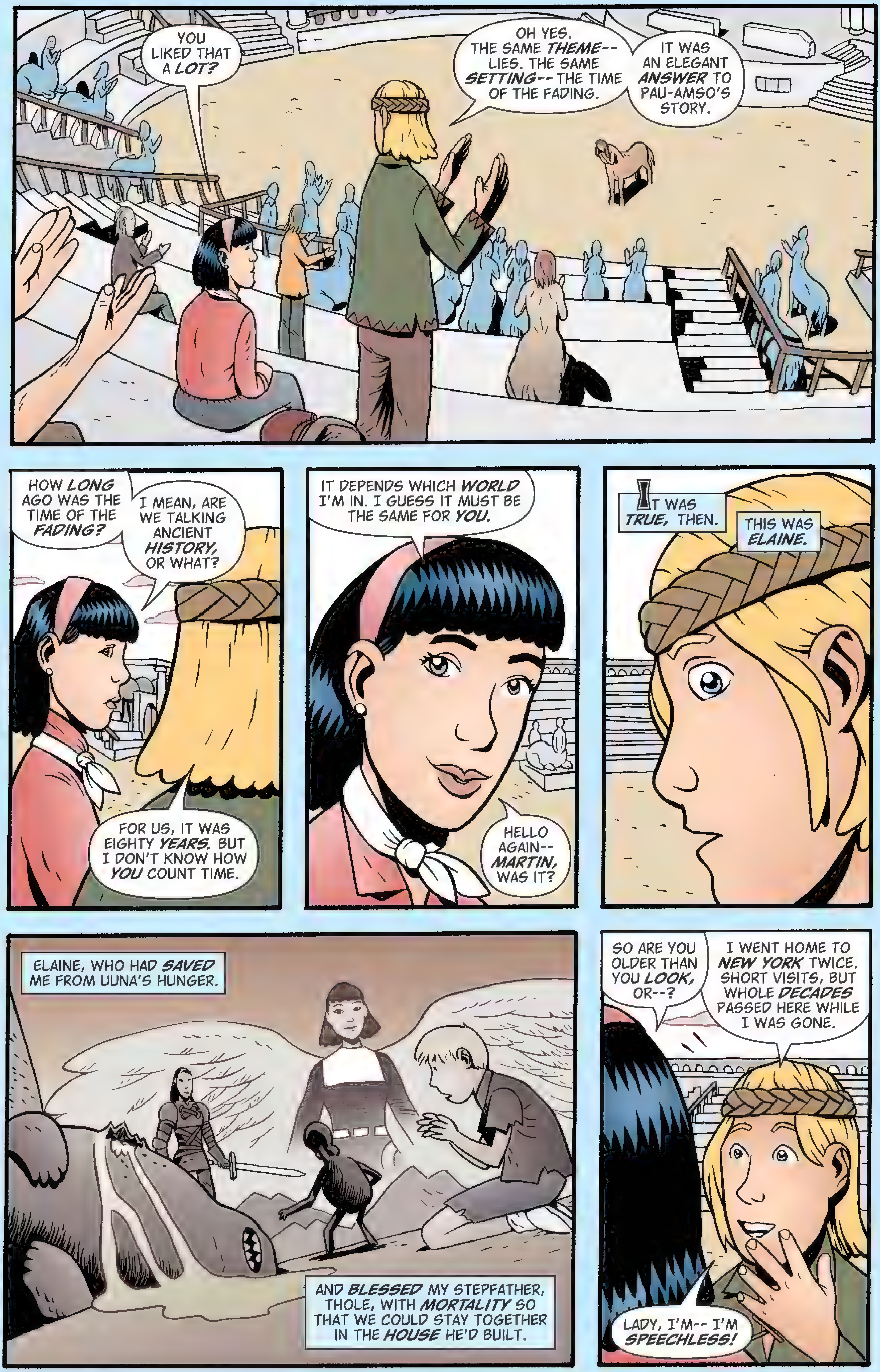

STORY-TELLING *IS* MAGIC, I THINK.
CHANGING THE WAY PEOPLE *THINK*-- THE WAY THEY SEE THE WORLD-- JUST BY *WORDS* AND NOTHING ELSE.
MAGIC?
THAT SOUNDS MORE LIKE *STITCH-GLASS.*
AND THEN I *HAD* IT.
YOU--
KAANG
THAT'S THE *GONG.* WE'D BETTER SIT *DOWN* OR WE'LL LOSE OUR PLACES.
EXCEPT THAT IT WAS *IMPOSSIBLE.*


THIS TELLER'S NAME WAS *IMETHRE.* I DIDN'T KNOW HER.
IT'S TRUE THAT *LIES* CAN TURN AND *BITE* THE ONE WHO LIED.
BUT DOES *TRUTH,* THEN, MAKE US HAPPY? *HEAR,* AND DECIDE.
"*PORTHY* WAS BORN UNDER A HAPPY OMEN. THE HAPPIEST OF *ALL.*
"HIS FIRST *CRY* CAME AS ELAINE FLEW THROUGH THE SKY WITH THE CLOAK OF *SPLENDOR,* TO TELL US THAT THE *FADING* WAS OVER.
"HE GREW UP TO BE A SMITH, AND HE MARRIED RU-HESSA OF IBLIS. HE WAS A GOOD CATCH, THE GOSSIPS SAID.
"STRONG AS A *LION.* HANDSOME AS THE *SUN* AT NOONDAY.
"AND STUPID AS A *STUMP.*
THUNK
"LIKE *ALL* LOVERS, THEY HAD THEIR MONTH OF *HONEY.* BUT WHEN THAT WAS FINISHED, THEY BEGAN TO *REPENT* OF THEIR BARGAIN.
"HER *BEAUTY* ASIDE, PORTHY SAW IN RU-HESSA FEW OF THE *VIRTUES* OF A GOOD WIFE.
"WHILE SHE, FOR *HER* PART, FOUND HER HUSBAND'S STUPIDITY A CONSTANT *GALL.*"


"SHE BEGAN TO TAKE *LOVERS.* AT FIRST, JUST ONE OR TWO.
"LATER, ONE OR TWO A *DAY.*
"THE *EVIDENCE* OF THEIR COMING AND GOING WAS HARD TO *MISS.*
I WAS SEWING IT FOR YOUR *BIRTHDAY,* PORTHY DEAR.
"BUT PORTHY HAD SPECTACULAR *GIFTS* IN THAT RESPECT.
YOUR *FATHER* MUST HAVE LEFT IT.
HE DROPPED BY LAST *TUESDAY.*
UMMM...
IT'S... MY LUCKY *HORSESHOE?*
"IN ANY CASE, THE DULLARD HAD HIS EYE SET ON *OTHER* THINGS.
"IT *OFFENDED* HIM THAT THE HOUSE WAS ALWAYS SUCH A STY. WHAT DID HESSA FIND TO *DO* ALL DAY?
"AND A *PLAN* FORMED IN HIS BRAIN, WHERE IT ECHOED LIKE A *PENNY* IN A GALLON DRUM.
"A PLAN TO SHAME HIS SLATTERN OF A WIFE INTO BETTER WAYS."


"THIS WILL SALT HER *TAIL,* HE THOUGHT. OH YES.
"THIS WILL *GRAVEL* HER, AND MAKE HER TEAR HER *HAIR.*
"WHEN OUR NEIGHBORS *SEE* WHAT I PUT UP WITH-- HOW DIRTY A *HOUSE* SHE KEEPS."
I'M OFF TO THE *FORGE,* MY LOVE.
VERY WELL, PORTHY, MY SWEETNESS.
I'LL SEND PRENTICE *STEPHEN* UP WITH YOUR LUNCH.


THOUGH PORTHY WAS NO MAN'S *GENIUS*--
"--STILL, HE WAS A GOOD ENOUGH *SMITH,* IN HIS PLODDING WAY--
"--AND A HINGE FOUR FEET *ACROSS...*
...IS STILL JUST A *HINGE.*
"THE PEOPLE IN THE *STREET* CRIED OUT AND POINTED.
"SUCH A SIGHT HAD NEVER BEEN *SEEN* BEFORE IN THE TOWN.
"RU-HESSA WAS *SHAMED.*
"AND *PORTHY* NO LESS, FOR BEING SO BLIND AND DEAF TO HIS OWN *CUCKOLDING.*
"SO I ASK YOU *THIS.*
"IS IT BETTER TO *SEE* THE TRUTH, IF THE TRUTH WILL HURT US, OR TO LIVE LONG IN THE PARADISE OF *FOOLS?*"
WHERE WILL WE BE *HAPPY,* GENTLES?
WHICH WAY SHALL WE SET OUR *SAIL?*


YOU LIKED THAT A *LOT?*
OH YES. THE SAME *THEME*-- LIES. THE SAME *SETTING*-- THE TIME OF THE FADING.
IT WAS AN ELEGANT *ANSWER* TO PAU-AMSO'S STORY.
HOW *LONG* AGO WAS THE TIME OF THE *FADING?*
I MEAN, ARE WE TALKING ANCIENT *HISTORY,* OR WHAT?
FOR US, IT WAS EIGHTY *YEARS.* BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW *YOU* COUNT TIME.
IT DEPENDS WHICH *WORLD* I'M IN. I GUESS IT MUST BE THE SAME FOR *YOU.*
HELLO AGAIN-- *MARTIN,* WAS IT?
IT WAS *TRUE,* THEN.
THIS WAS *ELAINE.*
ELAINE, WHO HAD *SAVED* ME FROM UUNA'S HUNGER.
AND *BLESSED* MY STEPFATHER, THOLE, WITH *MORTALITY* SO THAT WE COULD STAY TOGETHER IN THE *HOUSE* HE'D BUILT.
SO ARE YOU OLDER THAN YOU *LOOK,* OR--?
I WENT HOME TO *NEW YORK* TWICE. SHORT VISITS, BUT WHOLE *DECADES* PASSED HERE WHILE I WAS GONE.
LADY, I'M-- I'M *SPEECHLESS!*

OH GOD, DON'T BE. PLEASE. AND DON'T CALL ME LADY.
I'M NOT UP TO BEING SACRED RIGHT NOW.
AND HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN FOR YOU SINCE--?
SINCE I FLEW THROUGH THE SKY WITH THE CLOAK OF SPLENDOR? THAT WAS YESTERDAY.
INCREDIBLE!
YEAH. REALLY.
YOU SAVED MY LIFE. YOU AND THAT WILD WARRIOR WOMAN. AND NOW YOU'RE HERE.
IF I BELIEVED IN OMENS, I'D SAY--
MARTIN THOLE'S SON.
DAMN! IT'S MY TURN. WILL YOU STAY, AND LISTEN?
WELL, YOU KNOW HOW IT IS. UNLESS THERE ARE ANY UNIVERSES THAT NEED SAVING.
GOOD LUCK.

ELAINE! MY HEART WAS *RISING* INTO MY THROAT.
MY BODY SEEMED STRANGELY *WEIGHTLESS.*
THE LADY *ELAINE!*
I MADE A GOOD *ENTRANCE,* THOUGH. A *MAN,* TELLING A STORY!
I WAS A SENSATION BEFORE I SAID A *WORD.*
THE *THREADS* CANNOT THEMSELVES PERCEIVE THE PICTURE FORMING IN THE *WEAVE. LIES* ARE OUR THEME, AND I, THE THREAD, TO THIS WEAVE'S *PATTERN* BOW MY HEAD.
MY STORY IS "THE LOVE OF ESA-GALBA."
"SHE WAS THE WIFE OF *SALT.* THE MOTHER OF *STAR* AND *ESA-SIRIN.*
"SHE WAS A *SORCERESS,* LIKE ALL OF HER LINE. AND SINCE IN HER TIME THERE WAS A GREAT *PLAGUE,* SHE FOUGHT IT WHEREVER THERE WAS *NEED.*
"*STAY* WITH US A WHILE, HER HUSBAND, SALT, BEGGED HER. MY HEART FILLS WITH *FEAR* WHEN YOU LEAVE US.
"FEAR THAT YOU'LL *DIE,* A LONG WAY FROM HOME, AND WE'LL NEVER SEE YOU *MORE.*
"DEATH WON'T *COME* FOR ME, OR MINE, BELOVED. NOT WHILE THERE'S *EASIER* PREY.
"SHE *FEARS* TO HAVE ME AS AN *ENEMY.*"

"WAS IT *PRIDE* OR GOODNESS IN HER? WHO CAN *KNOW?*
"SHE RESTORED *MANY* WHO WERE BEYOND THE REACH OF MEDICINE, AND WHEREVER SHE WENT SHE WAS CALLED *SAVIOR.*
"AND ONE DAY, COMING *HOME* TO RIVER HOLT, SHE SAW THE BLACK *PLAGUE* FLAG FLYING OVER HER OWN *HOUSE.*
"SHE GALLOPED DOWN INTO THE *YARD* TO FIND HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN LAID OUT IN CEREMENTS OF *LEAD* FOR BURIAL.
"HOW *LONG?* SHE CRIED. HOW LONG SINCE THEY PASSED INTO THE *DRY* LANDS?
"MASTER SALT DIED THREE *DAYS* AGO, WITH YOUR *NAME* ON HIS LIPS.
"AND THE *CHILDREN* THIS LAST NIGHT, MAY THE BRIGHT SISTERS *REST* THEM.
"THEN THEY MAY STILL BE *CLOSE* ENOUGH TO THE LIGHT.
"PRAY IT BE SO, FOR I WON'T COME BACK *WITHOUT* THEM."

"INTO THE UNMADE LANDS SHE WENT, EXPECTING THAT THE WAY WOULD BE GUARDED BY DEMONS AND MONSTERS.
"BUT THERE WAS ONLY AN EMPTINESS SO VAST IT FROZE HER HEART WITHIN HER.
"SHE FOUND THE CHILDREN AT LAST, AND TOLD THEM THE WAY BACK TO LIFE.
"RUN AS FAST AS YOU CAN, SHE SAID, AND DON'T STOP UNTIL YOU FEEL THE SUN ON YOUR FACES.
"BUT THERE WAS NO SIGN OF SALT, AND SO SHE WENT ON, FOR MANY DAYS AND NIGHTS.
"UNTIL SHE CAME AT LAST TO A DEEP PIT, AND THIS WAS DEATH'S DOMINION.
"SALT WAS THERE.
"AND SO WAS EVERY OTHER SOUL THAT HAD DIED SINCE THE FIRST MAKING."

"SHE CALLED OUT TO HIM, BUT HE WOULD NOT *HEAR* HER.
"SHE PISSED ON THE GROUND SO THAT HE WOULD SMELL HER *NEED,* BUT HE MADE NO ANSWER.
"THERE WAS A *PATH* THAT LED UP THE SIDE OF THE PIT. BUT IF SHE DESCENDED, SHE WOULD BECOME AS THE *DEAD,* AND FORGET HER PURPOSE.
"SHE WOULD HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO MAKE *SALT* CLIMB UP TO *HER.*
"SO ESA-GALBA KINDLED A *DREAM*-- A LITTLE POINT OF *LIGHT* IN THAT DARK, DARK PLACE.
"AND HAVING KINDLED IT, SHE *SENT* IT FROM HER.
"IT *DANCED* IN FRONT OF SALT'S EYES, AND IT TOOK A *SHAPE.*
"THE SHAPE OF *ESA-GALBA* HERSELF, DANCING BEFORE HIM-- A DANCE OF LOVE, AND LUST, AND LONGING.
"WHEN SHE SHOWED HER *HAUNCHES* TO HIM, HE ROSE AND *FOLLOWED* HER.
"BUT ONLY A *LITTLE* WAY.
"LONG BEFORE HE REACHED THE LIP OF THE PIT, HE *STOPPED.*
"SO SHE SENT *ANOTHER* DREAM, OF HOW SHE HAD LOOKED ON THEIR *WEDDING* DAY.
"SHE *BECKONED* HIM, AND HE ROSE AND WALKED AGAIN."

"AND WHEN AT LAST HE *JOINED* HER ON THE LEDGE, HE WAS AGAIN HER *HUSBAND*-- THE MAN SHE HAD LOVED.
"BUT HE FOUND *HER* OLD AND DYING, *WITHERED* BEYOND IMAGINING.
"THE DREAMS SHE HAD SENT *BURNED* WITH THE FIRE OF HER OWN *SOUL*-- THE ONLY FIRE SHE HAD. SHE USED HERSELF *UP* IN THE MAKING OF THEM.
"SO THEY WERE *LIES*, OF A SORT-- PROMISES OF LOVE RENEWED, WHICH SHE KNEW SHE COULD NEVER *KEEP*.
"HE COULD NOT *CARRY* HER OUT OF THAT PLACE. HE LEFT HER THERE, AND WENT UP INTO THE *LIGHT*.
"WHERE-- FOR HER SWEET SAKE-- HE LIVED LONG AND *WELL*, AND SAW THAT THEIR *CHILDREN* DID TOO."
AND *THIS*, TOO, IS A LIE. *ALL* STORIES ARE LIES.
BUT *GOOD* STORIES ARE LIES MADE OF LIGHT AND *FIRE*.
AND THEY LIFT OUR *HEARTS* OUT OF THE DUST, AND OUT OF THE *GRAVE*.
JUST AS *ELAINE* DID. JUST AS SHE DOES *NOW*.
BECAUSE AN *AGE* TO US IS AS A DAY TO HER, AND SHE *WATCHES* US STILL.

HI.
HI.
HOW COME YOU GOT THE *SILENT* TREATMENT?
WELL, I TOLD A *CENTAUR* STORY. THEY'RE TRYING TO DECIDE WHETHER TO *DISQUALIFY* ME OR JUST *LYNCH* ME.
WHAT DID *YOU* THINK OF IT?
A LITTLE *SCHMALTZY* AT THE END-- BUT GOOD.
SCHMALTZY?
MEANS "SENTIMENTAL."
OH.
DON'T *TAKE* IT LIKE THAT. I REALLY LIKED IT A *LOT*.
LISTEN, HOW LONG UNTIL THE *PRIZEGIVING?*
AN *HOUR*. PERHAPS TWO.
IT DEPENDS HOW *VIOLENTLY* THE JUDGES DISAGREE. WHY?
LET'S GET AWAY FROM THE *SUSPENSE* FOR A WHILE.
IF THIS PLACE IS CALLED *RIVER* HOLT, THERE HAS TO BE A RIVER *BANK* SOMEWHERE AROUND HERE.

LOVE IS LIKE STITCHGLASS, TOO.
FEELING WHAT THE *OTHER* FEELS, AND SENDING WHAT *YOU* FEEL INTO THEM...
...UNTIL THE COLORS OF YOUR *SOULS*...
...RUN INTO ONE ANOTHER.
WE *WALKED* A LITTLE WHILE, AND THEN WE *LAY* A LITTLE WHILE, TOGETHER.
AND I THOUGHT NO *MORE* OF GARLANDS, OR OF *PRIZES*.
FIRESIDE TALES
MIKE CAREY WRITER ZANDER CANNON AND BIG TIME ATTIC ARTISTS
DANIEL VOZZO COLORIST JARED K. FLETCHER LETTERER MICHAEL WM. KALUTA COVER PAINTER
ANGELA RUFINO ASSISTANT EDITOR SHELLY BOND EDITOR
BASED ON CHARACTERS CREATED BY GAIMAN, KIETH & DRINGENBERG

Lux

BELOW THE *IMPERISHABLE* SPHERE, BUT STILL FAR ABOVE *ME,* THERE IS THE WORLD.
AND LOOK-- IT STILL *ENDURES.*
TRUE, THERE IS IN ITS *CITIES* RIGHT NOW A MORE MEDITATIVE *SILENCE* THAN THERE IS WONT TO BE.
A WONDERING *HUSH,* AS AFTER A GREAT *VOICE* HAS SPOKEN.
AND THE PEOPLE TAKE UP THEIR *LIVES.* ELAINE BELLOC, THEIR NEW GOD, HAS CALLED A *TRUCE* WITH HISTORY.
DULLED THE TERRIBLE *ACHE* OF RECENT MEMORY SO THAT THE LIVING CAN *REDISCOVER* WHAT LIFE IS.
THE *PRICE* IS THAT THEY DO NOT ASK OR *WONDER* TOO MUCH ABOUT WHAT HAS PASSED.
THE *NOW* IS THEIR ONLY HORIZON. THE CURTAINS ARE DRAWN *TIGHT* AROUND IT.
AND WHAT *CANNOT* BE--
--NEVER *WAS.*

YOU WANT SOME *SOUP?*
WE'VE GOT SOUP.
I'M *FINE,* THANKS.
THE COFFEE'S *GREAT.*
THE COFFEE TASTES LIKE *DIARRHEA--* BUT YOU'RE WELCOME.
WE HELP EACH OTHER BECAUSE WE *UNDERSTAND* EACH OTHER.
WE WERE ALL *DRAWN* HERE BY THE SAME HUNGER. THE SAME SENSE OF WHAT WAS *WAITING* FOR US.
YEAH, WELL, THAT'S NOT-- I'M NOT SURE THAT GOES FOR *ME.* I CAME TO SEE--
NEVER *MIND.*
WHAT'S YOUR *NAME,* KID?
RACHEL. RACHEL BEGAI.
WELL, IT'S *HARD* AT FIRST, RACHEL. TO ADMIT THAT YOU'VE HEARD A *CALL* THAT NO ONE ELSE--
HEY. HEY, GUYS.
LOOK! JUST *LOOK!*

HE'S *BACK.*
HE'S COME *HOME.*

EVENSONG

PART 1 OF 2

MIKE CAREY WRITER PETER GROSS & AARON ALEXOVICH ARTISTS
DANIEL VOZZO COLORIST JARED K. FLETCHER LETTERER MICHAEL WM. KALUTA COVER PAINTER
ANGELA RUFINO ASSISTANT EDITOR SHELLY BOND EDITOR
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THE MORNINGSTAR IS WEARY AFTER HIS GREAT EFFORTS.
BUT BENEATH THAT WEARINESS, ANOTHER VERY DIFFERENT EMOTION HAS BEGUN TO GROW.
RESOLUTION, PERHAPS? ANTICIPATION? I'M NOT PRIVY TO THE WORKINGS OF THAT QUICK, COLD-HOT MIND.
THAT TORRENT OF DEADLY CALM.
YOU COULD JUST AS EASILY CALL IT--
--EXCITEMENT.
HE BROKE THE GATEWAY LIKE BREAD, AND CAST THE BREAD UPON THE WATERS.
THAT WAS HOW IT STARTED. BUT NOW--
--NOW IT'S OVER. HE IS THE MAKER NO LONGER.

SO HE CALLS THEM HOME, ALL THOSE OTHER GATEWAYS.
AND THEY COME AT HIS CALL, AS MOST THINGS DO.
YAHWEH'S NAME CAN STILL BE SEEN AS FAINT SMUDGES AT THE CORNERS OF THE DESIGN.
BUT YAHWEH IS GONE, AND HIS NAME MEANS NOTHING NOW.
THE MORNINGSTAR DOES WHAT NO ONE ELSE COULD POSSIBLY DO.
HE FOLDS THE THING IN ON ITSELF AND FORCES IT TO BECOME AGAIN WHAT IT WAS AT THE START.
AT WHICH POINT--
--UNLESS I FLATTER MYSELF OUTRAGEOUSLY--
--HE IS SURPRISED.
HE SETS HIS TEETH. HE HATES INTRUSIONS INTO HIS AFFAIRS.
BUT ONCE HE'S CHOSEN A PATH, HE DOESN'T SWERVE FROM IT.

AND THE *NEXT* THING HE HAS TO DEAL WITH IS HIS *HOUSE.*
YOU'RE SO *LUCKY.* THE SAME NIGHT YOU *GET* HERE.
SOME OF US HAVE WAITED *YEARS--*
DOES IT *ALWAYS* SHINE LIKE THAT WHEN HE'S AT HOME?
NO, THIS IS A *REVELATION.* OR A *BLESSING.*
MAYBE HE JUST BROUGHT HOME SOME NUCLEAR *WASTE.*
I MEAN, YOU KNOW WHO THIS *IS,* RIGHT? WHO *LIVES* IN THERE?
I THINK IT'S AN ANGEL. KEN SAYS IT'S *GANDALF* THE WHITE.
I NEVER *SAID* THAT, JO. THAT WAS JUST A-- A *METAPHOR.*
IT'S *GOD'S* HOUSE. GOD'S HOUSE ON *EARTH.*
DON'T *OPPRESS* US WITH YOUR JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN *BULLSHIT,* GEORGIE.
IT'S THE FUCKING *TRUTH.* IF YOU'RE TOO *BLIND* TO--

Lux
OPEN TONIGHT
FUCK.

SLAM
DID YOU SEE? SHE-- SHE WAS *CHOSEN.* SHE WENT INTO THE *PRESENCE.*
OPEN TO
NO. THAT COULDN'T *HAPPEN.*
IT DOESN'T *MATTER* NOW.
NOTHING MATTERS NOW. THE *PULL*-- WHAT BROUGHT ME HERE--
I CAN'T *FEEL* IT ANYMORE. IT'S *GONE.*
ONE BY ONE, AS THE LIGHT *DIES,* THEY TURN AND STUMBLE AWAY TO RESUME *LIVES* LONG POSTPONED.
OPEN TONIGHT
AND HE MARKS THEIR *PASSING* NO MORE THAN HE DID THEIR *ARRIVAL.*

BUT THEN--
--THEY NEVER HAD ANYTHING THAT HE NEEDED.
HELP YOURSELF TO A DRINK, IF YOU WANT ONE.
THE BAR'S WELL STOCKED.
I DIDN'T COME HERE TO DRINK WITH YOU.
NO? WHAT THEN?
I JUST-- WANTED TO SEE FOR MYSELF.
I HAD A DREAM, WHERE YOU WENT AWAY FOREVER.
IT FELT LIKE A TRUE DREAM. A PROPHECY.
IT WAS A TRUE DREAM.
I SENT IT TO YOU.

YOU-- YOU WENT INTO MY MIND? YOU BASTARD! HAVEN'T YOU DONE ENOUGH TO ME ALREADY?
POSSIBLY. BUT I NEED A FAVOR.
FOR WHICH I'D BE PREPARED TO PAY.
DO YOU THINK I'D EVER BELIEVE A WORD YOU SAID AGAIN?
WHY NOT? I NEVER LIED TO YOU. AND THE PAYMENT IS SUBSTANTIAL.
BUT IT'S YOUR CHOICE. THERE ARE OTHERS I COULD ASK.
SO WHAT'S THE DEAL?
THE STRUCTURE OF THE AFTERLIFE IS ABOUT TO CHANGE.
A NUMBER OF THINGS BECOME POSSIBLE.
AMONG THEM, YOUR BROTHER'S REINCARNATION.

AND YOU'D-- WHAT, PUT IN A GOOD WORD FOR HIM?
SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
IN EXCHANGE FOR WHAT?
I'D WANT YOU TO LOOK AFTER SOMETHING FOR ME.
KEEP IT SAFE. IN CASE IT'S EVER NEEDED AFTER I'VE LEFT.
I HATE IT THAT YOU'RE USING ME AGAIN, LUCIFER.
I HATE IT THAT YOU THINK YOU'RE HONEST BECAUSE YOU NEVER TELL OUTRIGHT LIES.
YEAH.
OKAY.
EXCELLENT.
SO-- IS SOMEONE GONNA COME AND ASK ME FOR THIS SOMETHING?
POSSIBLY. IF SO, IT'LL BE THE WOMAN YOU MET IN YOUR GRANDFATHER'S HOGAN.
OR JUST POSSIBLY A VERY UGLY LITTLE CREATURE WHO SMELLS OF STALE TOBACCO.

CUTE. LOOKS JUST LIKE THE REAL THING.
BUT WHAT'S IT MEANT TO--
OH.
GOODBYE, RACHEL BEGAL. AND *CONGRATULATIONS.*
YOU COME OUT OF THIS *BETTER* THAN MOST.
YEAH.
I'LL BET I *DO,* AT THAT.

So.
SO.
DO YOU COME TO ME AT *LAST,* LIGHTBRINGER? YOU CAN'T HAVE MISSED THE *INVITATION.*
BUT NO. NOT YET. YOU *TURN* ON THE WINDS OF THE WORLD.
DIRECT YOUR COURSE *SOUTHERLY.* AND I KNOW *WHY.*
YOU'RE DOING EVERYTHING THAT *NEEDS* TO BE DONE.
IN STRICT AND *LOGICAL* SEQUENCE.
LEAVING NO LOOSE *ENDS* BEHIND YOU.
EXCEPT FOR *ONE,* OF COURSE.
EXCEPT FOR *ME.*

PLEASE COME *IN,* MORNINGSTAR.
AND CLOSE THE *DOORS* BEHIND YOU.
I CHOSE THIS PLACE BECAUSE I WANTED *SECLUSION.*
IF SOMEONE SEES *ANGELS* VISITING ME, I'LL FIND MYSELF THE CURATOR OF A *SHRINE.*
I meant to speak to you in the silver city, meleos. but you left too quickly.
I THOUGHT THIS WAS A GOOD TIME TO RETIRE AND PURSUE MY ART.
I'M TOO OLD TO ENJOY CHANGE, EVEN FOR THE BETTER.
that's *exactly* what I wanted to talk about.
MY *RETIREMENT?*
your *art.*
there were *other* factors involved, I know. fenris. sandalphon. lilith.
they all had a hand in the disaster we've just *SURVIVED.*

But in a way, it was the *Basanos* that set everything in *motion.*
Your creation. Your-- art.
You say you're too old to *change,* Meleos. That's what I'm *afraid* of.
That sooner or later you'll be tempted to *revisit* old themes.
THOSE-- ARE JUST DRAWINGS. I'M NOT-- I WOULDN'T *DREAM* OF BREATHING LIFE INTO THEM AGAIN.
LUCIFER, I HELPED YOU TO *DESTROY* THE BASANOS. REMEMBER?
Yes. I remember. But you *wept* as you did it.
And the artistic temperament *tends* towards amoral *extremes.*
SO YOU'D *KILL* ME? ON NOTHING BUT *SUSPICION?*
No.
Just remove some of your *options.*

NO! LUCIFER, I **SWEAR** TO YOU!
I WON'T--
GAAAAH!
I can't make that **stick**, of course. They'll grow **back** eventually.
But she'll have learned the **ropes** by then. She can deal with you however she **likes**.
YOU REAP WHAT YOU **SOW**, LUCIFER! YOU ALWAYS HAVE!
That's a point of **view**, certainly.
I'll give it some **thought**.
YOU'RE **SURROUNDED** BY HORROR AND CHAOS BECAUSE YOU **BIRTH** HORROR AND CHAOS!

IN MY REALM IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO DIG A GRAVE OR BUILD A SEPULCHRE.
THE DEAD ARE COMMEMORATED ONLY IN OUR THOUGHTS.
BUT ON MY WALL, THERE IS A TAPESTRY COMMEMORATING MY SONS' LIVES AND DEEDS.
IT IS THE FIRST THING I SEE WHEN I OPEN MY NEW EYES.
THE CRACKING OF STONE, AND MY GRUNTS OF PAIN, ARE LOUD ENOUGH TO BE NOTICED.
SO I AM ATTENDED. NOT BEFORE TIME.
DO YOU PROFANE MY BODY WITH YOUR EYES?
M-- M--
--MAJESTY--
YES. I AM YOUR QUEEN. THEREFORE KNEEL AND SHOW OBEISANCE.
THAT'S BETTER. WE HAVE A GUEST COMING.
PREPARE A ROOM FOR HIM, AND BURN SOME INCENSE.
AND RUN ME A BATH.
I'D LIKE TO SMELL SWEET FOR HIM.

TEETH.
SEVEN.
SEVEN AGAIN. FORTUNE *FAVORS* YOU, KIJO.
FORTUNE HAS NOTHING TO *DO* WITH IT. MY CASTS ARE *MEASURED* TO--
FOUR.
BLACK *BUGGERATION!*
BROTHERS--
SOMETHING WALKS *TOWARDS* US ON TWO FEET.
IT LOOKS LIKE A *MAN.*
THAT'S *ENOUGH* GAMING FOR ONE DAY.
WHAT? BUT YOU *FORFEIT* IF YOU RESIGN NOW.
THEN TAKE THE *POT,* AND WELCOME.
I THINK I'LL HAVE SOME *SPORT* WITH THIS MAN-THING.
YOU WERE FAR BETTER NOT.
AH, AWAY WITH YOU, FAINT-HEARTED FOOLS.

THERE IS A *TOLL* IF YOU PASS THIS WAY, STRANGER.
BONES OR EYES OR LIGHTS OR LUNGS. YOU MAY *CHOOSE* FOR YOURSELF.
I SAID THERE IS A *TOLL.*
DO NOT *ANGER* ME BY--
HE LEFT THE *BONES.*
AYE.
I SUPPOSE HE'S NOT *GIVEN* TO GAMBLING.

GREETINGS, LORD.
MY QUEEN AWAITS YOU IN HER AUDIENCE CHAMBER.
YOUR QUEEN IS ABOUT TO LEARN THAT SHE SHOULD HAVE KEPT HER ITCHY FINGERS TO HERSELF THIS TIME.
IS IT SO, LORD?
THANK YOU, LORD.

SO YOU'VE COME TO VISIT ME *AGAIN,* LUCIFER MORNINGSTAR?
LAST TIME YOU WERE MY GUEST, YOU STOLE MY *CHILDREN.*
ONLY BECAUSE YOU STOLE MY *WINGS,* IZANAMI. AND NOW YOU'VE BEEN INTERCEPTING MY *MAIL.*
YOU FOUND SOME OF MY *GATEWAYS,* AND BOUND THEM TO YOURSELF.
SO NOW YOU'VE GOT A *CORNER* OF THE LETTER OF PASSAGE. I NEED IT *BACK.*
BUT HERE IN *MY* DOMAIN YOU'RE POWERLESS.
MORTAL.
ENTIRELY AT MY *MERCY.*
TRUE. SO BY ALL MEANS, ROLL OUT YOUR *ARMIES* AND YOUR AMBUSHES. PUSH THE FIRST *DOMINO.*
WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO ME AND YOU, YOU KNOW I'LL STILL *KILL* YOU.
YES. THAT SEEMS *POSSIBLE.* EVEN *LIKELY.*
CERTAINLY I'VE *UNDERESTIMATED* YOU IN THE PAST.

SO PERHAPS--
--WE SHOULD TAKE OUR DIFFERENCES INTO *ANOTHER* ARENA.

CXUC

A SPIRIT MOVES ON THE FACE OF THE DEEPS. AND THE DEEPS RECEDE AND RE-FORM.
OUT OF SURPRISE, AS MUCH AS ANYTHING.
THIS SPIRIT HAS NEVER BEEN SEEN HERE BEFORE.
THIS SPIRIT IS NEW.

EVENSONG

PART 2 OF 2

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BASED ON CHARACTERS CREATED BY GAIMAN, KIETH & DRINGENBERG

ELAINE BELLOC IS REDECORATING.
SHIFTING THE RAW *STUFF* OF CREATION INTO STRANGE *CONFIGURATIONS.*
MAKING *ROOM* FOR WHAT'S TO COME.
SHE CONSIDERS THAT *HELL* IS A PLACE WITHOUT A PURPOSE, AND SO SHE PLOUGHS IT *UNDER.*
OUT WITH THE OLD.
IN WITH THE *NEW.*
ONE SMALL *CORNER* SHE KEEPS INTACT-- FOR THE LADY LYS, OF EFFRUL. IN *DEFERENCE* TO HER GRIEF.
FOR THE LADY *MOURNS,* NOW HE IS GONE, THE MAN SHE BOTH LOVED AND HATED. *CHRISTOPHER RUDD,* THE LATE DUKE OF GLY.
OTHER PLACES SHE DOES NOT SPARE A *GLANCE,* EVEN WHEN THEY WERE PLACES SHE *KNEW* OF OLD.
IN HER *FORMER* LIFE.
BEFORE SHE WAS *GOD.*

BUT THESE ARE CONSIDERATIONS FAR REMOVED FROM THIS PLACE, AND THIS TIME.
FAR MORE IMPORTANT, NOW, TO CONCENTRATE ALL MY ATTENTION ON MY GUEST.
ON THE LIGHTBRINGER.
MY LORD.
THANK YOU, QUEEN IZANAMI.
I TRUST IT ISN'T POISONED?
YOU MOCK ME, LUCIFER. OR PERHAPS YOU ACCUSE ME.
I WANT ONLY FOR THERE TO BE PEACE BETWEEN US.
WHY SHOULD THERE BE ANYTHING BETWEEN US? UNLESS YOU WANT REVENGE, WHICH I COULD UNDERSTAND.
OR UNLESS YOU THINK THAT I DO.
THE OLD ORDER-- YOUR FATHER YAHWEH'S CREATION-- IS ENDED. ALL THINGS MUST BE MADE ANEW.
THAT'S TRUE.
THERE SEEMS NO GOOD REASON WHY THEY SHOULD TAKE THE SHAPES AND PATTERNS THEY HAD BEFORE.

ELOQUENTLY PUT. STILL, YOU *MANIPULATED* ME INTO COMING HERE BY STEALING A *CORNER* OF THE LETTER OF PASSAGE.
I DON'T THINK IT WAS JUST SO YOU COULD OFFER ME *TEA*.
PERHAPS I PLAY FOR *POSITION*. FOR *ADVANTAGE*.
HOPING TO *INGRATIATE* MYSELF INTO THIS NEW PROVIDENCE-- AT ITS *OUTSET*.
I DON'T HAVE *TIME* FOR THIS.
STAY, MORNINGSTAR! YOU HAVE NOTHING *BUT* TIME.
BUT I KNOW BETTER THAN *ANYONE* HOW SHORT YOUR *PATIENCE* IS.
I THOUGHT-- SINCE WE HAD THE SAME *FUNCTION* ONCE--- AS RULERS OF THE *LIFE* THAT COMES AFTER DEATH--
--I MIGHT HAVE SOME *INSIGHT* INTO YOUR PRESENT SITUATION.
AND I BELIEVE WE CAN *DISCUSS* THIS SITUATION TO OUR MUTUAL *ADVANTAGE*.
IF YOU WILL *WALK* WITH ME, A LITTLE WAY, AND HEAR ME *OUT*.

BENEATH MY PALACE THERE IS A *CAVERN* WHICH EXTENDS FOR MANY MILES.
THAT IS WHERE I *TAKE* HIM.
ABOVE OUR *HEADS,* MY LORD, IS THE SEVEN-THROATED *CHAMBER--*
--WHICH I BELIEVE YOU HAD OCCASION TO *VISIT* WHEN YOU STAYED WITH US LAST.
THROUGH THIS *SINKHOLE* THE SOULS OF LIVING DREAMERS PASS INTO THE WINDOWLESS *CELLS* OF THE DAMNED.
TORMENTING THEM WITH VISIONS THEY CAN NEITHER *UNDERSTAND* NOR SHUT OUT.
IF YOU CLOSE YOUR *EYES,* THE IMAGES FLOW *THROUGH* YOU LIKE A RIVER.
SOME ARE *UNIQUE.* OTHERS RECUR AGAIN AND AGAIN-- ICONS ETCHED ON HUMAN MINDS TOO *DEEPLY* TO BE ERASED.
ONE OF THEM IS *YOU.*
WHEN YOU GAVE UP THE *THRONE* OF HELL, YOU DIDN'T LOSE YOUR *HOLD* ON THEIR IMAGINATIONS.
THE DEVIL. THE *ADVERSARY.* THE ANGEL WHO *FELL.*
YOU STILL *HAUNT* THEM. YOU'RE STILL ONE OF THE POLES THAT *DEFINE* THEM.]

BUT NOW YOU'RE GOING TO LEAVE, AREN'T YOU?
YOU'RE GOING TO USE THE LETTER OF PASSAGE, AND DEPART FROM THIS CREATION FOREVER.
My plans are my own. But anyone could have guessed that.
Why else would I have remade the letter from its parts? Why else would I have come here?
I KNEW IT! I KNEW IT! YOU CAME TO ME NAKED, AND IT WAS A DIFFERENT KIND OF NAKEDNESS THAN BEFORE.
IT WAS IN YOUR EYES. IN THE WAY YOU WALKED.
I WANT TO BE THE LAST THING YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU LEAVE.
That's unlikely.
THEN LET ME BE AT LEAST, SOMETHING THAT YOU GIVE UP--
--WITH REGRET.

THE BOWLS AT MY CHAMBER DOOR ARE FILLED WITH CRUSHED ROSE PETALS, AS I SPECIFIED.
THEIR SWEET SCENT THICKENS THE AIR.
MY PALE SKIN SHOWS BEST AGAINST SCARLET, SO SCARLET SILKS DRAPE MY BED.
HERE TOO THERE ARE PERFUMES, OF HEADY MUSK AND DARK CEDAR.
LACQUERED SCREENS HIDE OUR CONGRESS FROM THE WORLD.
ALTHOUGH THE DESIGNS-- IN THE SHUNGA STYLE-- PROVIDE MUTE COMMENTARY.
AND LONG AND LATE WE LIE TOGETHER.
AFTER A COUPLING WHICH-- LIKE THE PERFUMES-- DECEIVED EXPECTATION.
SHARP UNDER SWEETNESS. DELICATE AND HARSH AT ONCE.

AND NOW YOU'LL *LEAVE.*
as soon as you've given me what I *came* for, yes.
YOU HAVE NO WISH TO *LINGER* HERE A LITTLE LONGER?
NO. THAT'S NOT YOUR *WAY,* IS IT?
I MIGHT PROVE TO BE VERY PLEASANT *COMPANY* ALONG THE ROAD.
I'm taking *nothing* with me, Izanami. That's the point.
This moment is a *break* from the past. It needs to be-- it *will* be-- complete.
THEN THERE'S NO MORE TO BE *SAID.* I WON'T TRY TO CHANGE YOUR MIND, OR *DETAIN* YOU.
IN FACT, IT WOULD BE BETTER IF YOU LEFT AT *ONCE.*
BUT TO GO *FORWARD* IS HARDER THAN YOU THINK, MORNINGSTAR.
MOST THINGS--
--COME FULL *CIRCLE.*

HE KNOWS-- OF *COURSE* HE KNOWS-- THAT MY SUMMONING HIM HERE WAS A PART OF SOME *LARGER* DESIGN.
HE KNOWS. BUT HE DOES NOT *CARE.*
FOR THE TIME OF *LEAVETAKING* HAS COME.
IT RISES IN HIS HEART LIKE A NEW *SUN,* HOT AND RED.
MAJESTY?
SUMMON MY MAIDS.
AND MY *STEWARDS.* AND THE CAPTAINS OF THE *GUARD.*
AND MY *GOLDSMITHS.*
BRING *THEM,* TOO.
I AM ASSESSED.
I AM DISMISSED.
I AM *INVISIBLE.*
I AM OF HIS *PAST.*
WITH THE *LIGHT* OF THAT NEW SUN IN HIS EYES, THE PAST IS STYGIAN *BLACK.*

ARMAGEDDON PLAIN.
THE SILVER CITY LIES LIKE A BROKEN TOY.
ONCE IT WAS THE HOME OF GOD.
DESPITE APPEARANCES--
LUCIFER!
FINALLY!
--IT STILL IS.
THIS LOOKS AMBITIOUS.
I MADE A PROMISE TO CHRISTOPHER RUDD.
THAT IN THE NEW CREATION THERE'D BE NO HELL. NO OUBLIETTE FOR INCONVENIENT SOULS.
THESE NESTED REALMS ARE THE BEST DESIGN I'VE COME UP WITH SO FAR.
BUT THEY'RE STILL NOT WORKING, AND I DON'T KNOW WHY. TAKE A LOOK.
NO.
ABSOLUTELY NOT.

WHAT? I JUST-- I NEED A SECOND *OPINION*, THAT'S ALL.
NO. YOU *DON'T*.
BUT EVEN IF YOU DID, I'D HAVE TO *REFUSE*.
YOU CAN USE *SERVANTS*-- DEMIURGES-- AS MY FATHER DID, BUT YOU CAN'T HIRE *CONSULTANTS*.
THIS CREATION IS YOURS. YOUR *WILL* HAS TO BE THE ONE THAT *SHAPES* IT.
THE BUCK STOPS *HERE*.
NOW AND *FOREVER*.
THANKS. I WAS FEELING *BAD* ABOUT THIS. BUT NOT BAD *ENOUGH*, EVIDENTLY.
THIS IS IT, ISN'T *IT?* THE TIME? IT'S WRITTEN ALL OVER YOUR *FACE*.
MAZIKEEN IS UP IN THE *PRIMUM MOBILE*. SHE HASN'T *MOVED* FROM THERE SINCE YOU LEFT. YOU'D BETTER GO *SEE* HER.
TRUST YOUR *INSTINCTS*, ELAINE BELLOC. IF MERCY'S YOUR AIM, BE *RELENTLESS* IN YOUR MERCY.
BE *ABSOLUTE*. BE YOURSELF, UNTIL YOU *BLEED*.
GOODBYE, UNCLE.
AND-- GOOD *LUCK*.

I HAVE NO *USE* FOR SILVER.
GOLD. GOLD IS MY ONLY *MIRROR* IN THIS WORLD.
IT HAS NO *COMMERCE* WITH OXYGEN.
IT HOLDS ITSELF *ALOOF* FROM BASER METALS.
WHAT RISES MUST *FALL*.
WHAT *FLOWERS*, FADES.
THAT IS THE *LAW*. THE ONE IMMUTABLE *TRUTH*.
THE *LIVING* TRAVEL ALWAYS TOWARDS *DEATH*.
THE *OCEAN* THAT RECEIVES ALL TRIBUTARIES.
BUT GOLD *ENDURES*.

MAJESTY--
--WE ARE *READY.*
I WANT NO *COMPROMISE* WITH BEAUTY, KITABURO. NO *SOFTENING.*
LET ME BE *TERRIBLE* TO BEHOLD.
SO TERRIBLE THAT TO HOLD MY *GAZE* IS WORSE THAN DEATH.
THERE WILL, AFTER ALL, BE *COMPARISONS.*
IT'S *INEVITABLE.*

MAZIKEEN, DAUGHTER OF LILITH.
THE PASSION SHE SHARES WITH LUCIFER MORNINGSTAR GOES *UNREMARKED* IN MYTH AND LEGEND.
ALL THE MORE REASON, PERHAPS, TO BELIEVE IN IT.

I came to say GOODBYE.
I'm going to be leaving soon. alone.
WHY?
Because I've exhausted the POSSIBILITIES.
I've been the GOVERNMENT, and the DISSIDENT. Both palled.
I MEANT--
--WHY ALONE?
Because of what I am, and always was.
Because of what I want, and NEED, to be.
But I have something for you. a parting GIFT.

WHAT CAN YOU *GIVE* ME THAT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
NOT TO *SEE* YOU-- NOT TO *TOUCH* YOU AGAIN--
mazikeen.
when I walk *away* from here, everything else will fall from me like sloughed *skin.*
you-- I'll have to *work* to forget.
and this gift-- although it may not be what you most *wanted*--
--will still be our *marriage.* our *union.*
NO! MY LORD, NO!
DON'T--

BIRTH IS A *TEDIOUS* BUSINESS AT BEST. PROTRACTED. SORDID.
THE METHOD *I* FAVOR INVOLVES NO BLOOD, OR TEARING. NO *STRAIN* OF PARTURITION.
NO LOSS OF *DIGNITY.*
OF COURSE, I COULD NOT CARRY LUCIFER'S CHILD. THAT WAS A MIRACLE BEYOND MY REACH.
IF I AM *PREGNANT* NOW, I AM PREGNANT-- WITH *MYSELF.*
BUT THAT CHANGES *NOTHING.*
HE IS *STILL* THE FATHER.
EVERY MAKER MUST HAVE AN *ADVERSARY,* AFTER ALL. IT IS MEET, AND IT IS *FITTING.*
I RESPECT *TRADITION.*
I *UNDERSTAND* THE NEED--
--FOR *CONTINUITY.*

LUCIFER, WHAT-- WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE* TO ME?
MY *FACE*--
YOUR FACE IS *NOT* THE GIFT.
I ONLY WANTED TO *SEE* YOU AGAIN--
--AS BEAUTIFUL AS YOU WERE WHEN YOU FIRST *CAME* TO ME.

BUT THE GIFT IS THE *FIRE.*
THE *FIRE?*
MY NAME. MY *NATURE.*
THE LIGHT THAT MY *FATHER* LIT IN ME WHEN THE *WORLDS* WERE FIRST MADE.
I--
--I AM--
--THE *LIGHTBRINGER?*
YOU'RE THE *LIGHTBRINGER,* YES.
AND YOU--?
I'LL GO BY WHATEVER LIGHT I *FIND.*
YOU THINK THAT WALKING AWAY FROM YOUR LIFE MAKES YOU *FREE,* MY LORD?
THAT YOU CAN BE BORN AGAIN SO *EASILY?*

EXUL
YOU'RE **WRONG.** YOU WILL **REMEMBER** MY LOVE.
ERASE THAT **MARK** IF YOU LIKE, BUT YOU PROVE YOURSELF **COWARD** IF YOU DO.
COWARD AND **LIAR.**
EXUL

THE PAST *MADE* US, LUCIFER. IT *CONTINUES* TO MAKE US.
TRAVELLING *LIGHT* DOESN'T CHANGE YOUR ORIGIN. OR YOUR *DESTINATION.*
HE LOOKS AS THOUGH HE MIGHT *SPEAK.*
BUT HE DOES *NOT* SPEAK.
HE DOES NOT CALL HER BACK, OR *CONTRADICT* HER.
BUT HE KNOWS-- HE *MUST* KNOW--
--THAT HE HAS *TRAVELLED* BY MEANDERING ROADS TO THE PLACE WHERE HE ALWAYS *MEANT* TO BE.
THAT THE FIRE -- THE WINGS -- THE THRONE -- WERE ONLY *ACCIDENTS.* TRICKS OF THE *LIGHT.*
BENEATH ALL ASPECTS, *ALL* ACCIDENTS, THERE IS THE NAKED *WILL.*
ALWAYS. ONLY.

HE STEPS INTO THE *VOID* LIKE A MAN RISING TO GREET HIS OWN *REFLECTION*.
ACROSS TIME, AND SPACE, AND SOULS, HIS ECHOES *FADE*.

The Gaudium Option

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Based on characters created by GAIMAN, KIETH and DRINGENBERG

SO THIS IS A JOB THAT'S TOO *DIRTY* FOR HEAVEN TO HANDLE.
IS *THAT* IT?
NO, GAUDIUM, THAT'S *NOT* IT AT ALL.
THEN HOW COME YOU'RE TALKING TO *ME?*
I MEAN, YOU'RE GOD NOW, RIGHT?
THINE IS THE POWER AND-- ACCORDING TO *RUMOR*-- THE GLORY.
YOU REMEMBER WHEN *LUCIFER* DESTROYED THE MANSIONS OF THE SILENCE-- JUST BY *WALKING* THERE?
TO THE POINT OF *INCONTINENCE* I REMEMBER IT. SO?
SO-- I'M STARTING TO *UNDERSTAND* WHY GODS DON'T *DO* VERY MUCH.
THERE'S TOO *MUCH* POWER.
IT'S LIKE MY WILL IS THE SUN, MY MIND IS A *MAGNIFYING* GLASS, AND THE UNIVERSE IS AN *ANT.*
IF I *FOCUS* TOO HARD--
DO ME A *FAVOR,* ELAINE, AND JUST GIVE IT A *NAME.*
YOUR *METAPHORS* ARE SCARING THE *SHIT* OUT OF ME.

!!
I'M BUILDING A NEW *AFTERLIFE.* I ALREADY *DISMANTLED* HEAVEN AND HELL.
WHOOO! *BIG* ONE!
AND MOST OF THE OLDER REALMS ARE EMPTY NOW. THEY CAN BE LEFT TO WIND DOWN BY *THEMSELVES.*
BUT THERE'S A SORT OF-- *SUBBASEMENT.* I THINK IT'S *PREHUMAN.*
BUILT OUT OF THE FEARS AND HOPES OF *ANIMALS.* MAYBE THE ANIMALS THAT BECAME *MEN.*
AND THIS PLACE IS GIVING YOU TROUBLE?
IT'S BECOME A *REFUGE* FOR THINGS THAT SHOULD HAVE GONE INTO THE *DREAMING* LONG AGO.
AND *SOME-THING* DOWN THERE IS RESISTING ME. PULLING *AGAINST* ME.
I WANT IT TO *STOP,* BUT I DON'T WANT TO DO A LUCIFER AND *HURT* INNOCENT PEOPLE. SO I THOUGHT, IF YOU COULD *FIND* IT FOR ME--
ARE YOU REALLY GOING TO *EAT* THAT?
WELL, UNLESS YOU WERE GONNA TAKE ME TO LUNCH AT THE *SAVOY*--
YES! *ANYTHING!* LET THE PIGEON GO!
OUTSTANDING. I'LL GO GET MY TUX. THEN LET'S SEE--
RECRUIT SOME BACKUP.
MINIMAL BRIEFING.
HIT THE ROAD.

--AND THEN THEY BROUGHT THE *CHEESE* PLATE. THEY HAD THIS *FRENCH* STUFF, LOOKED LIKE THE INSIDE OF SOMEONE'S SPLEEN.
GAUDIUM--
BUT IT TASTED OKAY IF YOU DIPPED IT IN *BRANDY* AND SET IT ON FIRE.
WILL YOU JUST SHUT *UP* ABOUT THE FUCKING SAVOY? I DON'T KNOW *HOW I* EVEN LET YOU DRAG ME INTO THIS.
HEY, IT'S NOT LIKE I TWISTED YOUR *ARM*, SPERA.
I JUST THOUGHT IT'D BE *SATISFYING* IF THE OLD POSSE *RODE* AGAIN ONE LAST TIME.
THE OLD *POSSE?*
YEAH. THE *NAGLFAR* MASSIVE.
MOST OF THOSE ENTITIES ARE *DEAD.*
AND THE REST WON'T TAKE *MY CALLS.* SO FUCK 'EM. IT'S YOU AND *ME,* SIS.

YEAH.
I'M THINKING OF JOINING A *SUPPORT* GROUP.

Y'KNOW, THIS PLACE SUCKS THE BIG *GANGRENOUS* ONE.
WHERE'D ALL THE *SURREAL* ESTATE COME FROM, ANYWAY?
WELL, ACCORDING TO ELAINE'S *BRIEFING* NOTES, THIS PLACE IS A *PALIMPSEST.*
IT HAS *FRAGMENTS* OF ALL THE OTHER AFTERLIVES GRAFTED ONTO A *PRELINGUISTIC* SUBSTRATE.
I ONLY SPEAK *ENGLISH,* SPERA.
OKAY. LOOK.
!!
SCHLUCK!
THIS IS SOME *ANIMAL'S* IDEA OF A GOD.
IT EXISTS BECAUSE IT'S *BELIEVED* IN.
GOD IS A PRAWN?
IF YOU'RE *KRILL,* HE IS. AND OF COURSE, SINCE KRILL HAVE EFFECTIVELY NO *MEMORY,* THESE THINGS ARE FORMING AND MELTING *AWAY* ALL THE TIME.
BUT THEY MAKE GOOD *EATING* FOR BIGGER THINGS.
RENEGADES FROM OTHER LANDS OF THE DEAD THAT WEREN'T PULLING IN THE BIG *NUMBERS* ANYMORE.
RRRRRRRRRR
CUE DEEP-THROATED *ROAR.*
IT'S OKAY. WE'RE NOT IN ANY *DANGER.*
AND WHY IS *THAT,* EXACTLY?

BECAUSE I'M PACKING *HEAT.*
YOU'D BETTER BE PACKING A FRIGGIN' *FLAMETHROWER.* THIS THING IS *IMMENSE!*
I *SAID* IT'S OKAY.
YOU'VE GOT TO BE *SHITTING ME!* YOU'RE GONNA FIGHT OFF RABID *GODS* WITH A PEN?
LONELY COSMOS SHADOWLAND NECROVERSE
IT'S MIGHTIER THAN THE *SWORD,* BROTHER MINE.
CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE THING THAT'S STAMPEDING TOWARDS US?
LONELY COSMOS SHADOWLAND NECROVERSE
IT'S-- IT'S LIKE A *WEASEL* THE SIZE OF AN *ELEPHANT.*
WITH *WINGS!* MOTHER OF *FUCK!*
THAT SOUNDS LIKE A JAPANESE *RAIJU.* R... A... I...

GAAAAAH!
J... U...
PERIOD.
THE BOOK IS OUR *UPLINK* TO ELAINE. SEE? SHE'S GOT AN IDENTICAL *COPY* OPEN IN HER LAP RIGHT NOW.
ANYTHING I *WRITE* IN HERE, SHE DEALS WITH. IT'S LIKE SENDING COORDINATES FOR A *BOMBING* RUN.
raiju
I'M THE ONE SHE ASKED TO DO THIS JOB. HOW COME *YOU* GET THE MAGIC BOOK?
I'VE GOT NEATER *HANDWRITING* THAN YOU.
YOU DO *NOT.*
DON'T SULK, GAUDIUM.
LOOK, THAT'S *AMA-NO-HASHIDATE--* THE STAIRWAY TO *HEAVEN.*
I *HATE* THAT SONG.
EXCEPT FOR THE *ROLF HARRIS* VERSION.

WHAT IS THE POINT OF ALL THIS SHIT, ANY-WAY?
HUH? OH, THIS IS WHAT'S LEFT OF CHALMECACIVATI. AN AZTEC AFTER-LIFE FOR DEAD CHILDREN.
NOT WHAT I MEANT, SPERA.
I MEAN ALL OF IT. HUMANS MAKE UP BULLSHIT STORIES ABOUT WHERE THEY CAME FROM AND WHERE THEY'RE GOING.
AND THEN THEY LIVE IN THEM. THEY TURN THE WHOLE OF ETERNITY INTO A FUCKING SOAP OPERA.
REALITY IS MESSY AND SCARY. STORIES GIVE A KIND OF SHAPE TO IT.
YEAH, BUT IT'S A STUPID SHAPE. WHY SHOULD BABIES GET THEIR OWN HEAVEN?
WHO'S GONNA CHANGE THEIR DIAPERS? TOOTH FAIRIES?
BROTHER, LOOK AROUND YOU. THEIR IMAGINATION IS SO MUCH STRONGER THAN THEIR FLESH. THEIR BODIES ARE JUST LAMP-SHADES FOR THEIR MINDS.
WE ARE SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON.
WE'RE ALSO STANDING ON THE EDGE OF A CLIFF--
OOP!
--OVER AN ABYSS FILLED WITH RAVENING DEMONS.

AL-SIRAT, THE PURGATORY OF THE ZOROASTRIANS.
"CAN ONLY BE CROSSED BY MEANS OF A BRIDGE THINNER THAN THE THINNEST HAIR."
SEE, THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.
A BRIDGE THINNER THAN THE THINNEST HAIR? AND IF YOU'RE A SINNER IT BREAKS AND YOU'RE DEMON-CHOW, RIGHT?
FUCKING CROCK OF SHIT.
YOU WANNA PIECE O' ME, YOU NOTIONAL SCUMBAGS?
YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO DO BETTER THAN--
"NOTORIOUSLY PRONE TO WIND SHEAR."
OH DEAR.

GAUDIUM!
GAUDIUUUUM!
OH NO.
YEEEEHAAA!

GRRRRRRR
DOWN, BOY!
DOWN!
WHAT WAS CERBERUS DOING IN A ZOROASTRIAN ABYSS?
I DUNNO. CHASING CATS?
GOOD BOY/BOYS. DELETE AS APPLICABLE.
MAYBE THIS WOULD BE A GOOD PLACE TO REST UP AND GET OUR BEARINGS.
WE CAN PICK SOME FRUIT FROM THE PEACH TREES OF KHUN-LUN.
ARE THERE ANY LANDS OF THE DEAD THAT HAVE JACK DANIELS TREES?
SO WHAT DO WE *KNOW* ABOUT THIS MISTER X WHO'S MESSING UP THE BIG *PLAN?*
ONLY THAT HE KEEPS *MOVING* SO ELAINE CAN'T GET A PROPER *FIX* ON HIM.
AND THAT HE'S NOT ONE OF THE *BIG* PLAYERS.

I'M GUESSING A RENEGADE *DEMON* FROM HELL.
"FROM *HELL*"?
FROM *ONE* OF THE HELLS. YOU KNOW WHAT I *MEAN*.
I HOPE IT'S NOT A *SHIKO-ME*. THEY'RE DISGUSTING.
LIKE GREAT BIG *CREEPY-CRAWLIES*.
FEH! SPRAY A CAN OF *RAID* IN THEIR FACES, THEY FOLD LIKE--
HEY!
HOW COME IT'S *SNOWING*?
THIS ISN'T SNOW. IT'S *ASH*.
OKAY, THEN LET ME *REPHRASE* THE QUESTION.
WHY IS IT *ASHING*?
THIS IS JUST A WILD *GUESS*--
--BUT MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE THE *PEACH* TREES ARE ON FIRE.

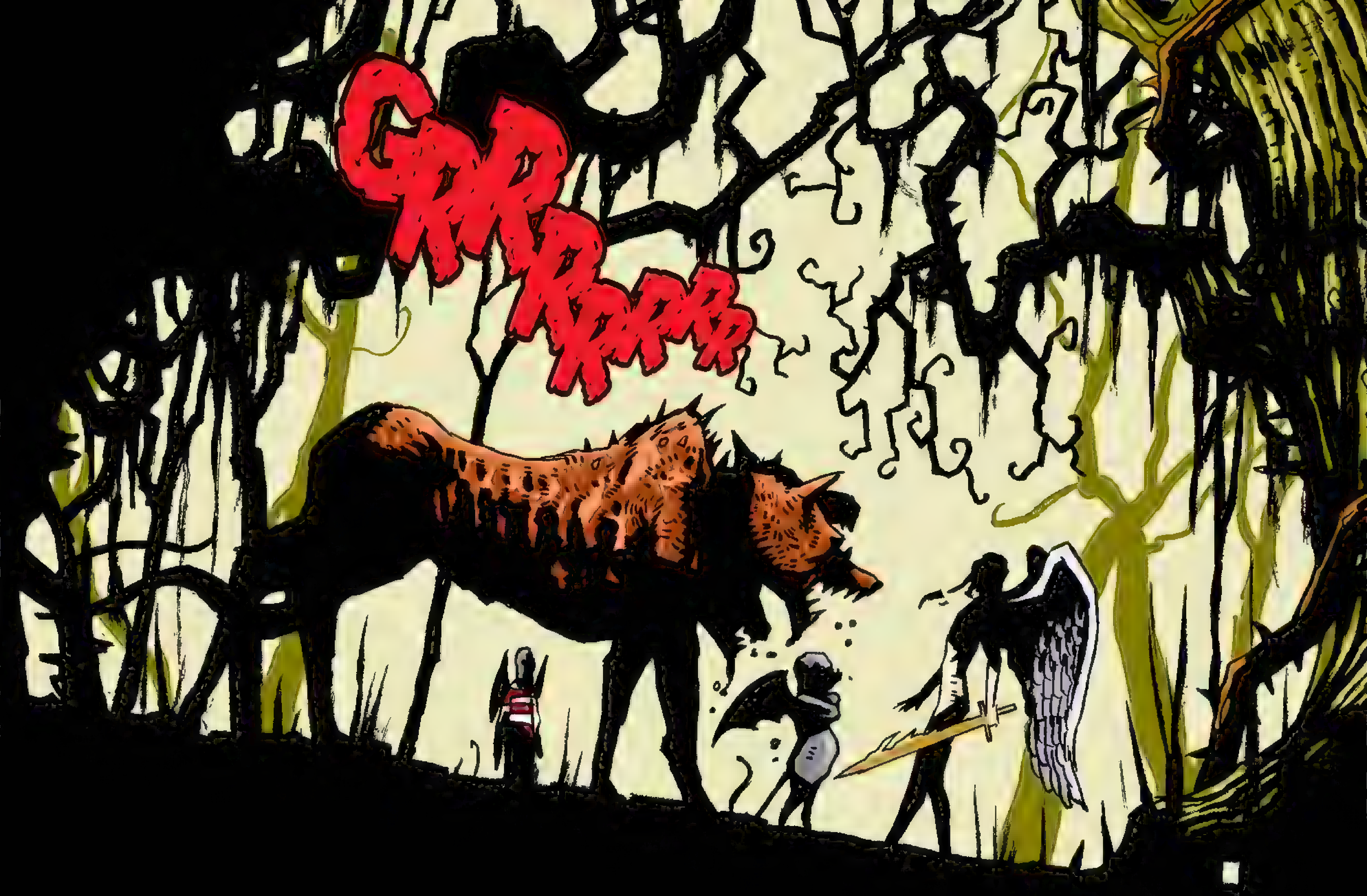
OH YEAH. I GUESS THAT WOULD DO IT.
WHIIIIIINE

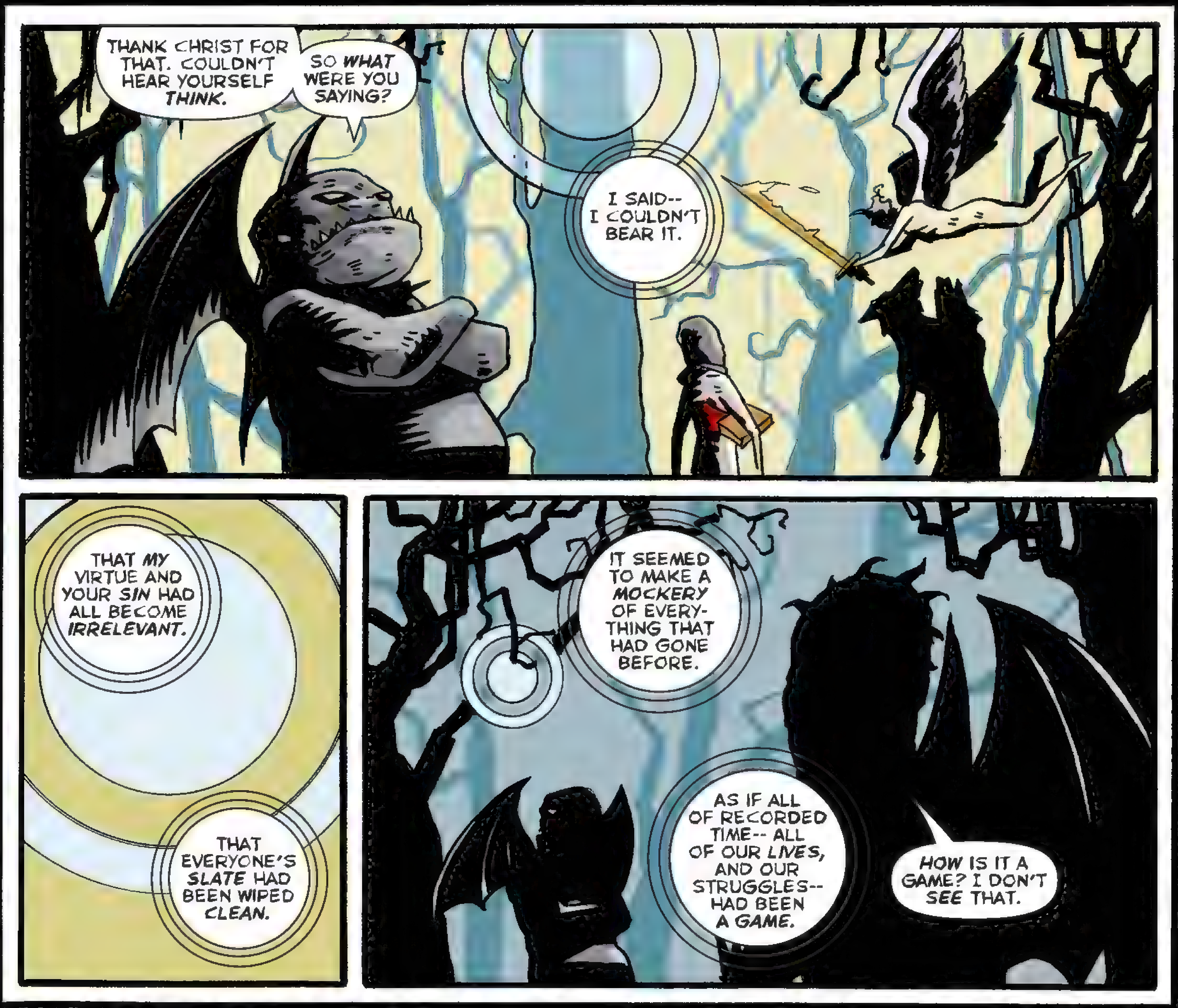
GIDDYUP, NEDDY.
GET THE FUCKING *LEAD* OUT!
GAUDIUM, WAIT FOR *ME!*
THIS IS *PHLEGETHON*-- THE RIVER OF FIRE.
NO SHIT.
HOW CAN YOU *TELL?*
BEAR *LEFT!*
MAYBE WE CAN LOSE IT ON THE SLOPES OF *MOUNT MERU!*
IT'S *GAINING* ON US!
FUCKING *PEACHY.* OKAY, HOLD ON TIGHT.
WE'RE ABOUT TO RUN OUT OF *MOUNTAIN.*

JEEZ! WE MADE IT! THAT *MEAD HALL* DOWN THERE SURE GOT *RAINED* ON, THOUGH.
VALHALLA, GAUDIUM. DOESN'T *MATTER.*
IT WAS PROBABLY FULL OF MACHO *SHIT-HEADS.*
THAT WAS NO *ACCIDENT.* SOMEONE *SET* THAT FUCKING RIVER ON US.
YEAH. AND I THINK I CAUGHT A *GLIMPSE* OF HIM, TOO.
YOU DID? WHAT WAS HE *LIKE?*
HE WAS *SPHERICAL,* HE WAS FLOATING IN THE *AIR* AND HE WAS BRIGHT *BLUE.*
REMIND YOU OF ANYONE?
OUR BROTHER *LUMEN?* HOLY FUCK!
HOLY FUCK *INDEED.*
BUT-- HE DOESN'T HAVE THE *BALLS.* DOES HE?
NO. HE *DOESN'T.* BUT THE TWO OF US *TOGETHER*--
--THAT IS A *DIFFERENT* PROPOSITION.

IF THE *ABOMINATION* SENT YOU, YOU WILL BE *SORRY.*
HER AUTHORITY IS NOT *RECOGNIZED* HERE.
IS THAT--?
REMIEL. FORMER LORD OF HELL-- WHICH IS SOMETHING *ANY* SCHMENDRICK CAN ADD TO HIS *RÉSUMÉ* THESE DAYS.
WITH OUR *BROTHER.* I COULD DIE FROM *SHAME.*
WE HOLD *OUT* AGAINST THE ABOMINATION.
WE STAND *LOYAL* TO YAHWEH AND HIS REVEALED TRUTH, THOUGH ALL ELSE HAVE *BETRAYED* HIM.
NOW *CHOOSE.*
BETWEEN--?
REPENTANCE, FOLLOWED BY DEATH. OR DEATH *OUTRIGHT.*
LUMEN, YOU SELF-RIGHTEOUS *FUCK,* DON'T YOU *GIVE* A DAMN ABOUT THE FAMILY NAME?
WELL OBVIOUSLY YOU DON'T GIVE A *DAMN,* BUT STILL--
DEFIANCE. RESOLUTION. SERENITY.

SERENITY? YOU'RE *SERENE* ABOUT THIS?
CERTAINTY. ABSENCE OF DOUBT.
ENOUGH WITH THE GODDAMN ABSTRACT NOUNS! JUST BECAUSE YOU NEVER *SINNED*--
SIGH ALL RIGHT. ALL RIGHT.
GAUDIUM, WILL YOU FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE SHUT UP AND LISTEN?
"FOR ONCE IN MY LIFE?" WHAT'S *THAT* SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
WE'RE LISTENING, LUMEN. GAUDIUM, BE *QUIET*.
I-- I JUST COULDN'T *BEAR* IT.
I *SAID* YOU HAD TO CHOOSE.
HEY, PAL, THE SPHEROID'S GOT THE *FLOOR* HERE, OKAY?
TAKE A *NUMBER*.
LUMEN, THEY ARE *SERVANTS* OF THE ABOMINATION.
WE CAN HOLD NO *PARLEY* WITH.
YOU ARE *REALLY* STARTING TO STICK IN MY *TEETH*.
SIC 'IM, BOY(S)!


GRRRRRRR

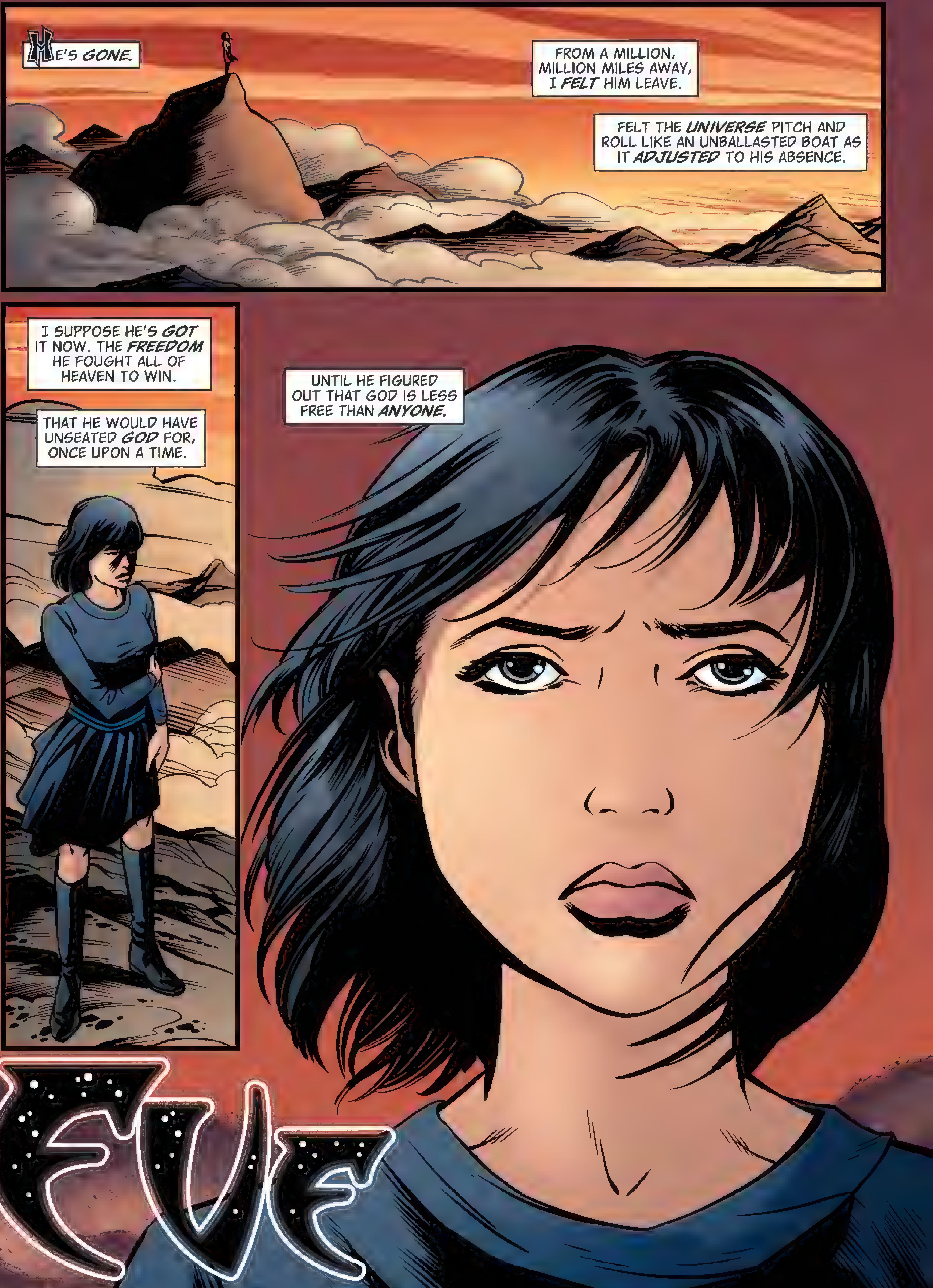

THANK CHRIST FOR THAT. COULDN'T HEAR YOURSELF *THINK*.
SO *WHAT* WERE YOU SAYING?
I SAID-- I COULDN'T BEAR IT.
THAT *MY* VIRTUE AND YOUR *SIN* HAD ALL BECOME *IRRELEVANT*.
THAT EVERYONE'S *SLATE* HAD BEEN WIPED *CLEAN*.
IT SEEMED TO MAKE A *MOCKERY* OF EVERYTHING THAT HAD GONE BEFORE.
AS IF ALL OF RECORDED TIME-- ALL OF OUR *LIVES*, AND OUR STRUGGLES-- HAD BEEN A *GAME*.
HOW IS IT A GAME? I DON'T SEE THAT.

WE *MADE* OUR CHOICES-- AND I GUESS OUR CHOICES MADE *US*. DEFINED US AS WHAT WE *ARE*.
WE DON'T *STOP* BEING THAT JUST BECAUSE THE *RULES* CHANGE.
FORGIVE ME, SISTER, BUT THAT SOUNDS LIKE *CASUISTRY*.
I AGREE. STILL *LISTENING* HERE.
I THOUGHT I FOUGHT FOR THE *RIGHT*, AND THE *GOOD*. BUT WHAT *IS* THE GOOD?
YAHWEH *TIRED* OF US, AND WENT AWAY. A *CHILD* RULES US NOW.
NOTHING IS BETTER OR *WORSE* THAN ANYTHING ELSE. GRIEF. *UNBEARABLE* GRIEF.
YOU'RE GOING *ABSTRACT* AGAIN. LOOK AT IT *THIS* WAY, BROTHER--
FETCH! *FETCH*, BOY!
--YAHWEH'S PLAN *FORESAW* AND INCLUDED A TIME WHEN THERE WOULD *BE* NO PLAN.
HE *LAUNCHED* US, AND THEN HE LET US GO. ISN'T THAT WHAT *EVERY* PARENT DOES?
YOU MEAN-- YOU SEE THIS AS--?
THE REAL *PERFORMANCE*. WHAT COMES AFTER THE *REHEARSALS*.

IT WAS *EASY* TO BE VIRTUOUS WHILE YAHWEH WAS *TELLING* YOU WHAT VIRTUE WAS.
HEY, LOOK WHAT THE *DOG* SICKED UP.
BUT NOW YOU HAVE TO *DEFINE* VIRTUE FOR YOURSELF.
FALLEN. UNFALLEN. THAT'S ALL JUST *BULLSHIT*. TRUTH ISN'T HANDED *DOWN*, BROTHER.
YOU BEAT IT OUT WITH *HAMMERS* AND ANNEAL IT IN YOUR OWN *BLOOD*.
YOU-- YOU GIVE ME HOPE, SISTER.
HEY, THAT'S WHAT IT SAYS ON THE *LABEL*.
THE BEGINNINGS OF HOPE. SOMETHING FROM WHICH HOPE MIGHT GROW.
YOU WILL-- *PAY* FOR YOUR SINS-- WITH YOUR *LIVES!*
HOW ARE YOU *SPELLING* REMIEL?
DOES IT JUST TAKE THE *ONE* L, LIKE "ASSHOLE"?
I DO NOT *NEED*-- SPEAR OR SWORD-- TO SMITE THE *UNRIGHTEOUS*.
I COULD *GIVE* A FUCK.
I... E... L...
PERIOD.

NICE *WORK.*
THANKS. HAVE YOU ***MET*** MY BROTHER?
HE'S KIND OF THE RADIANT WHITE UNBLEMISHED ***SHEEP*** OF THE FAMILY.
THIS IS REMIEL. THE ***ANGEL*** WHO RULED HELL WITH DUMA, AFTER LUCIFER ***LEFT.***
WHAT WAS ***HE*** DOING DOWN HERE?
I DUNNO. PFFFT! PFFFT!
I GUESS HE DOESN'T GET THAT WHOLE THING ABOUT VIRTUE BEING BEATEN OUT WITH HAMMERS.
HEY, THAT'S ***MY*** LINE!

WELL, HE CAN'T DO ANY REAL *HARM.* I'LL GIVE HIM A LITTLE HELL OF HIS *OWN* TO LOOK AFTER.
SOMEPLACE WHERE HE CAN *STAY* UNTIL HE'S READY TO COME *OUT.*
EH, YOU'RE TOO *SOFT.* I'D'VE GOT *VULTURES* TO EAT OUT HIS LIVER OR SOMETHING.
I'M TRYING TO MOVE *AWAY* FROM THAT STUFF, GAUDIUM.
I KNOW, BUT SOMETIMES-- SON OF A *BITCH!* LUMEN, DID YOU JUST MANIFEST IN *FLESH?*
THIS IS A NEW *WORLD.* A NEW *TIME.*
IT FEELS-- APPROPRIATE TO *GREET* IT WITH A NEW FACE AND FORM.
COME AND HAVE A PINT OR TWO OF *BOURBON.* YOU CAN GREET IT WITH A NEW *BRAIN,* TOO.
GAUDIUM, HE'S ENTIRELY WITHOUT *SIN!*
FUT
FUT
FUT
NEVER TOO LATE TO *START,* SIS. NEVER TOO LATE TO *START.*


HE'S *GONE.*
FROM A MILLION, MILLION MILES AWAY, I *FELT* HIM LEAVE.
FELT THE *UNIVERSE* PITCH AND ROLL LIKE AN UNBALLASTED BOAT AS IT *ADJUSTED* TO HIS ABSENCE.
I SUPPOSE HE'S *GOT* IT NOW. THE *FREEDOM* HE FOUGHT ALL OF HEAVEN TO WIN.
THAT HE WOULD HAVE UNSEATED *GOD* FOR, ONCE UPON A TIME.
UNTIL HE FIGURED OUT THAT GOD IS LESS FREE THAN *ANYONE.*
EVE

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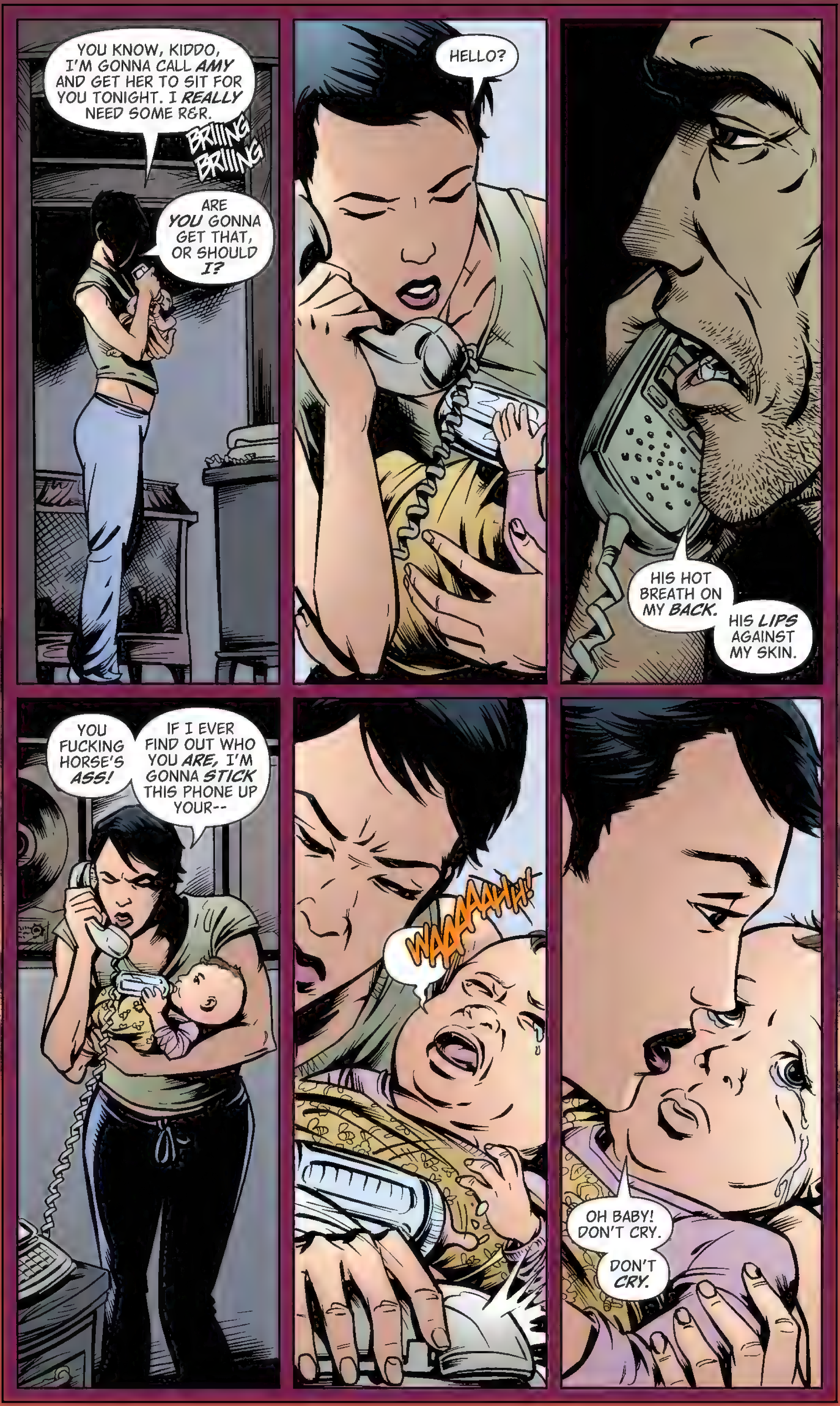
MY BODY STANDS ON A MOUNTAINTOP IN KATMANDU. MY MIND SLIDES BETWEEN THE TOWERS OF MANHATTAN.
LOOKING FOR A SPECIFIC SOUL. A SINGLE SPOOR.
THIS ISN'T THE ONE--
WAAAAAHH!
--BUT IT'S CLOSE ENOUGH.
OH SHIT.
ALL IN ALL, JILL PRESTO IS HANDLING THE SINGLE MOTHERHOOD THING REALLY WELL.
I'M COMING, NOEMA.
JEEZ, SINCE WHEN DID TWENTY MINUTES COUNT AS A NAP?
BUT SHE'S AMAZED AT THE COLLATERAL DAMAGE.
SATISFIED NOW, YOU CRUMMY LITTLE EXTORTIONIST?
THE EXHAUSTION AND THE TEARS. THE HORMONAL STORM.
THE LOSS OF PERSPECTIVE.
I PLANT A SEED.
GODS AREN'T SUPPOSED TO MEDDLE, I KNOW. BUT THEN--
--I'M PRETTY NEW TO THE BUSINESS.


YOU KNOW, KIDDO, I'M GONNA CALL *AMY* AND GET HER TO SIT FOR YOU TONIGHT. I *REALLY* NEED SOME R&R.
BRIIING BRIIING
ARE *YOU* GONNA GET THAT, OR SHOULD *I?*
HELLO?
HIS HOT BREATH ON MY *BACK.*
HIS *LIPS* AGAINST MY SKIN.
YOU FUCKING HORSE'S *ASS!*
IF I EVER FIND OUT WHO YOU *ARE,* I'M GONNA *STICK* THIS PHONE UP YOUR--
WAAAAAAHH!
OH BABY! DON'T CRY.
DON'T *CRY.*

TWELVE BLOCKS UPTOWN AND SEVEN WEST, THIS MAN-- JACK ELLIOT STAVANGER-- *SAVORS* JILL'S WORDS.
AND STILL MORE, THE *STRENGTH* OF THE EMOTION THAT HE'S *AROUSED* IN HER.
I KNOW *HIM,* TOO.
KNOW THE *ROOTS* OF HIS STRANGE ECSTASY.
KNOW THE *COURSE* IT HAS TO TAKE.
PRESTO
AND THIS TIME I *DON'T* INTERFERE.
WHICH MAY BE THE BIGGEST SIN OF *ALL.*
YOU CAN? OH THAT'S *GREAT,* AMY!
UMM-- SEVEN O'CLOCK? I'M NOT PLANNING TO BE *OUT* ALL THAT LATE.
SEE YOU THEN.
LOOK IT UP IN THE *STATUTE* BOOK, KIDDO.
ONE NIGHT PER MONTH DOES *NOT* CONSTITUTE CHILD ABUSE.

THE SILVER CITY. OR WHAT'S *LEFT* OF IT.
IN THE RECENT *WAR,* IT LOST A GREAT DEAL MORE THAN *HALF* OF ITS INHABITANTS.
AND NOW--
MAZIKEEN! WAIT!
--IT SEEMS TO BE ABOUT TO LOSE ONE *MORE.*
WHAT SHOULD *STAY* ME? HE'S *GONE,* AND HE WON'T RETURN.
I'VE NO USE FOR *CONSOLATION,* ELAINE BELLOC. OR FOR *PITY.*
I WASN'T OFFERING *EITHER.*
THEN WHAT? DON'T ASK ME FOR *FAVORS.*
I'LL RUN NO MORE *ERRANDS* FOR HEAVEN.
ACTUALLY, I WAS HOPING YOU'D COME AND HAVE A *DRINK* WITH ME.
FOR OLD *TIMES'* SAKE.

NO. NO NO NO NO NO.
YOU GOT IT WRONG. SHE MUST'VE SAID BOTH OF US.
ME AND YOU.
IT'S A GIRLIE THING, GAUDIUM. A GIRLS' NIGHT OUT.
THEN WHO ELSE IS COMING?
WELL, LET ME SEE--
THAT DEAD GIRL, MONA, WHO'S SORT OF A GODDESS NOW.
MAZIKEEN, DAUGHTER OF LILITH.
AND SOME HUMAN WOMAN. CAN'T REMEMBER HER NAME.
THEN IT'S A GIRLIE, GHOST, GODDESS, AND DEMON THING.
WE'RE ALL TECHNICALLY FEMALE.
GET OVER IT, BROTHER MINE.
I THINK MAYBE I'LL GO AS A BLONDE.
OKAY, FUCK IT. WHO CARES?
I'LL GO TEACH LUMEN HOW TO HUSTLE POOL.
OR IS THIS TOO UNDERSTATED, DO YOU THINK?
SLAM

I WALK ON *EARTH.* IN LONDON, IN GOLDERS HILL PARK. AND IT'S *AUTUMN* AGAIN, JUST LIKE IT WAS WHEN I *LEFT.*
EVERYTHING *EXACTLY* LIKE IT WAS.
EXCEPT *ME.*
HI. CAN I *SIT* HERE?
WHAT? OH.
YES. OF COURSE.

IT'S GREAT THAT THERE ARE STILL SO MANY *ROSES* IN FLOWER.
WHAT? YES.
BRIDESMAID AND DELIZY. THEY'RE LATE *BLOOMERS.*
IT-- ACTUALLY, YELLOW *DELIZY* WAS MY DAUGHTER'S *FAVORITE.*
IT HAS AN *AMAZING* SMELL. LIKE *PEACHES.* SHE USED TO-- WE USED TO COME HERE WHEN--
THAT'S A NICE *STORY.*
BUT YOU NEVER HAD A DAUGHTER.
WH-WHAT? WHAT ON *EARTH* DO YOU MEAN?
YOU HAD A *SON,* NAMED CAL.
HE WAS *TINY* WHEN HE WAS BORN. FOUR POUNDS AND TWELVE OUNCES.
YOU COULD NEVER *BELIEVE* THAT, SEEING HOW TALL HE GREW.
AND NOW HE'S AT THAT GAWKY, *AWKWARD* AGE WHERE HE CAN'T *TALK* TO YOU.
BUT YOU REMEMBER HIM WHEN HE BABBLED LIKE HE DIDN'T HAVE AN *OFF-SWITCH.* LIKE EVERYTHING IN THE *WORLD* HAD TO BE WRAPPED IN WORDS UNTIL HE *UNDERSTOOD* IT.
AND YOU REMEMBER HIS FIRST DAY AT *SCHOOL,* WHEN HE HELD ONTO YOU AND *CRIED* AND WOULDN'T LET YOU LEAVE.
AND *YOU* CRIED TOO, WHILE ALL THE OTHER MOTHERS STARED AND TUTTED, BECAUSE YOU COULDN'T *BEAR* FOR HIM TO BE UNHAPPY.
IT WAS *MY* FIRST DAY, BUT YOU REMEMBER IT AS *HIS.*

AND YOU'RE *WAITING* FOR HIM NOW. HE WORKS AT THE MOVIE THEATRE ON SATURDAYS. THE IONIC.
YOU'RE GOING TO DRIVE HIM *HOME.*
GOODBYE, MUM. I *LOVE* YOU.
I LOVE YOU SO *MUCH.*
MY BROTHER, CAL, DIED TRYING TO FIND ME IN THE MANSIONS OF THE SILENCE.
WAY TO GO, ELAINE. ONE MORE *BOX* TICKED.
ONE MORE LOOSE *END* ALL NEATLY *SORTED.*
AND AS YOU TIE THEM *OFF,* ONE BY ONE--
--YOU REALIZE THAT YOU'RE NOT LEAVING YOURSELF ANYTHING AT ALL TO HANG *ON* TO.
UNTIL FINALLY YOU FALL *OFF.*
INTO THE *SKY.*

HI, MISS PRESTO.
AM I TOO *EARLY?*
34
NO, AMY, YOU'RE RIGHT ON *TIME.* THERE ARE TWO BOTTLES OF *FORMULA* IN THE FRIDGE. GIVE HER--
34
C
UH-HUH. ONE AT *NINE,* ONE IF SHE WAKES UP *LATER.*
RIGHT. THIS IS MY *CELL* NUMBER. AND THIS IS THE NUMBER OF THE *BAR.*
IS SHE STILL TEETHING?
OH BOY, YOU'D BETTER *BELIEVE* IT. I JUST GAVE HER SOME GEL. SHE CAN'T HAVE ANY MORE UNTIL TEN.
'KAY.
MAYBE THIS ISN'T SUCH A GOOD *IDEA.*
OF COURSE IT IS. HOW *ELSE* AM I GONNA PAY FOR MY *TUITION?*
GO. HAVE A GOOD *TIME.*
AMY, I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF I REMEMBER *HOW.*
BUT I GUESS THERE'S ONE WAY TO FIND *OUT.*

CLOSE MY EYES, OPEN THEM, AND I'M BACK IN NEW YORK.
MEET AND GREET TIME, AND YEAH, I KNOW. I MUST BE CRAZY.
PAROKLEET
UH... DID I JUST *ZIG* WHEN I SHOULD HAVE *ZAGGED?*
BUT I WALKED INTO A BAR IN L.A. AND I'M SEEING *MANHATTAN* OUT THE WINDOW.
NO, RACHEL. YOU'RE IN *EXACTLY* THE RIGHT PLACE.
WELL, TONIGHT IS-- SORT OF SPECIAL. SO I'VE RELAXED THE RULES A LITTLE.
COME AND MEET MY OTHER FRIENDS.
THIS IS RACHEL BEGAI, EVERYONE. RACHEL, THIS IS SPERA. MONA. AND MAZIKEEN MORNINGSTAR.
HI.
HELLO, RACHEL.
MAZIKEEN *MORNINGSTAR?*
IT'S A *LONG* STORY. WHAT CAN I *GET* YOU?
MOST OF US ARE ON MIMOSAS.

I LIKE THAT LITTLE *PURSE*. WHERE'D YOU *GET* IT?
OH, THIS? THANKS. IT'S ACTUALLY A PLASTIC BAG FROM K-MART.
I JUST PUT A KIND OF *WEIRDING* THING ON IT.
VERY COOL.
I DUNNO. IT'S SORT OF STRANGE HAVING A *BODY* AGAIN AFTER SO LONG.
EMOTIONS FEEL *BUMPIER* WHEN YOU'RE IN A BODY. IT'S LIKE BEING IN A *CAR* WITH NO SUSPENSION.
HEY, MAZIKEEN.
ARE YOU AND LUCIFER REALLY-- YOU KNOW-- *INVOLVED?*
WE *WERE*.
NOT ANY-*MORE*.
RIGHT. THAT'S WHAT I *HEARD*.
AND THERE'S SOMETHING I'VE BEEN *DYING* TO ASK YOU.

BECAUSE, I MEAN, I'VE SEEN HIM *NAKED* LOTS OF TIMES, AND HE DIDN'T HAVE ANY-- HE WAS *MISSING* THE NECESSARY--
FRONT ROW CENTER WAS JUST *EMPTY*, YOU KNOW?
SO HOW DOES HE *DO* IT?
WOW.
OH. HEY. MY OTHER *GUEST* JUST SHOWED UP.
MAZ, *PROMISE* ME YOU WON'T FREAK OUT. PLEASE.

JILLY JILLY, IT'S *EVENING* TIME! WHAT CAN I *GET* YOU, MISS PRESTO?
MARGARITA PLEASE, FRANK.
GOT YOU ON A *PROMISE.* YOU SAID YOU'D SIGN THAT *PHOTO* FOR ME.
WELL, DIG IT *OUT.*
I KNOW YOU SWORE YOU'D *KILL* HER. BUT CAN WE HAVE A *TRUCE,* JUST FOR TONIGHT?
IT WOULD MEAN A *LOT* TO ME.
A TRUCE? HONOR *KNOWS* NO TRUCE.
BUT THAT *INSULT* SEEMS A LONG TIME AGO, NOW. AND SHE *FOUGHT* BESIDE ME ON THE NAGLFAR.
FOR HER COURAGE, I WILL *FORSWEAR* MY OATH.
THANK YOU.
THAT DRINK'S ON *ME.*
NOPE, IT *ISN'T.*
THANKS, BUT I DON'T TAKE *DRINKS* FROM PEOPLE I DON'T *KNOW.*
BUT YOU *DO* KNOW ME, JILL. YOU DID SOMETHING VERY *KIND* FOR ME ONCE. A FEW YEARS AGO.
I'D LOVE IT IF YOU'D COME AND SHARE A FEW *DRINKS* WITH ME.
I DID? I DON'T *REMEMBER* THAT. BUT YOUR FACE *IS* KIND OF FAMILIAR.
...
YEAH, OKAY. WHAT THE *HELL.*

EVERYONE, THIS IS *JILL PRESTO.* YOU PROBABLY KNOW HER FROM *MTV.*
FROM *MTV?* I DELIVERED HER BAB--
OWW! JESUS!
SPERA, DID YOU JUST *KICK* ME?
WHY WOULD I DO *THAT?*
THEONLYTIMEI EVER*KICK*PEOPLE ISWHENTHEY'RE ABOUTTOBLURT OUTSOMETHING *STUPID*SONO.
I *DIDN'T* KICK YOU. OBVIOUSLY.
I COULDN'T *BELIEVE* THIS. HE PUTS HIS HANDS ON MY *BREASTS,* AND HE GOES "YOU SHOULD BE SINGING FROM *HERE.*"
SO I SAID, "ARNOLD, *YOU* SHOULD BE SINGING *FALSETTO.*" AND I GRABBED HIM BY THE--
I NORMALLY JUST SAY "NO THANKS, I'M WAITING FOR MY *BOY-FRIEND.*"
--AND *TWIST,* LIKE THIS, COMING BACK FOR A *DISEMBOWELLING* THRUST.
YEAH, THAT'D *WORK.*

THE TIME GOES BY. TOO *FAST.*
SO THE *PEANUT BOWL* IS THE HOST OF HELL?
NO, THE *BEER BOTTLES* ARE THE HOST OF HELL. THE PEANUT BOWL IS THE *CITY.*
SORRY. GO ON.
I SAVOR EVERY MOMENT. *SAVE* EVERY MOMENT: I'M GOD, SO I CAN *DO* THAT.
AND THEY'RE ALL *PRECIOUS,* IN THEIR DIFFERENT WAYS.
JILL PRESTO TELLING *MAZIKEEN* ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MIDDLE *EIGHT.*
MAZIKEEN NOT REACHING FOR HER *SWORD.*
MONA 'FESSING UP AT LAST THAT THE HEDGEHOGS TAKE *ADVANTAGE* OF HER. TAKE STUPID *RISKS,* KNOWING SHE'LL BE THERE TO SAVE THEM.
SPERA AND RACHEL HELPING HER TO CRY IT *OUT.*
AND THE *BABY* PHOTOS, AND THE DIRTY *JOKES,* AND THE TALES OF *HORROR* ABOUT OLD, DISCARDED BOYFRIENDS.
THE CLOCK BEHIND THE *BAR* GETS STUCK ON 1:55. IF ANYONE NOTICES I'M *CHEATING,* THEY DON'T SAY.
BUT *ELSEWHERE* THE CLOCKS ARE STILL TICKING. AND MOST OF US HAVE GOT *LIVES* TO CATCH.
I LET IT *GO* AT LAST, AND THE SECOND HAND SWINGS ROUND LIKE A *SCYTHE.*

HEY, YOU KNOW THAT *LINE* "HIS HOT BREATH ON MY *BACK,* HIS LIPS AGAINST MY *SKIN?*"
UH-HUH?
WELL, WAS THAT A *REAL* HE? WAS THAT SONG, YOU KNOW, *ABOUT* SOMEONE?
YEAH.
IT WAS ABOUT ELIJAH *WOOD.*
NO WAAAY! IS THAT EVEN *LEGAL?* I THOUGHT HE WAS STILL IN *HIGH SCHOOL* OR SOMETHING!
WELL SOMETIMES IT'S *FUN* TO TEACH A YOUNGER GUY THE ROPES, YOU KNOW WHAT I *MEAN?*
OH SHIT, IS THAT THE *TIME?*
I GOTTA GO LIBERATE THE *SITTER.* CIAO, LADIES! IT'S BEEN *AMAZING.*
WELL, OKAY. ONE OF US CAN *WALK* WITH--
NO.
LET HER WALK *ALONE.*

HELLO, AMY? YEAH, I'M SORRY. I *MET* SOME PEOPLE AND I SORT OF GOT--
TWENTY *MINUTES,* TOPS. I'LL GRAB A *CAB.*
OH *GREAT.*
WHERE DO THEY KEEP *TWENTIETH STREET* AROUND--
--HERE?
HIS HOT BREATH ON MY *BACK.*
HIS *LIPS* AGAINST MY SKIN.
GET YOUR FUCKING *HANDS* OFF ME, YOU FREAK!
HIS *LIPS!*
YES! YES! HIS *LIPS!*

WELL *MET,* JILL PRESTO. YOU'VE *UPGRADED,* I SEE.
THOUGH THE HAND I MADE FOR YOU WAS A LABOR OF *LOVE.*
WH-WHAT? DO I *KNOW* YOU?
WELL, YOU DID *ONCE.* AND YOU WILL *AGAIN,* I HOPE.
BUT FOR NOW, CONSIDER ME A FORTUITOUS *STRANGER.* AND CALL ME-- BORIS? YES, BORIS. BORIS GELLMAN.
WELL *THANKS,* MISTER GELLMAN. REALLY. I-- I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'D HAVE *DONE* IF YOU HADN'T BEEN THERE.
SOMETHING VIOLENT AND *MEMORABLE,* I'M SURE. BUT I'M HAPPY TO HAVE BEEN OF *SERVICE.*
NOW YOU *MUST* ALLOW ME TO SEE YOU HOME.
"BORIS GELLMAN"? HE'S *BERGELMIR.* AND YOU SET THAT *UP.*
HE WAS ALREADY *LOOKING* FOR HER. I JUST PLAYED WITH THE *TIMING* A LITTLE.
BUT YOU'RE *RIGHT,* MONA. AND THAT'S WHY I HAVE TO-- YOU KNOW.

IF I CARRY *ON* LIKE THIS, I'LL ALWAYS BE BENDING THE RULES FOR THE PEOPLE I LOVE.
AND I'LL NEVER GET THE *BIG* PICTURE.
OH, CURLY. *SIGH*
SO I'M GOING TO KIND OF-- LET GO OF *MYSELF* AND SINK INTO *EVERYTHING.*
BE PART OF THE *WORLD.* BE PART OF EVERYTHING THAT *HAPPENS.*
RUN IT FROM THE *INSIDE,* INSTEAD OF FROM UP ON *TOP.*
THAT'S WHY I WANTED TO DO *THIS.* TONIGHT.
IT FELT *WRONG* TO LEAVE WITHOUT SAYING *GOODBYE.* AND THANK YOU.
SA'AH NAAGHAI BIK'EH HOZHO, ELAINE.
WELL, THAT'S THE *PLAN.* GOODBYE, RACHEL.
SAY HELLO TO YOUR BROTHER *PAUL* FOR ME.
MY-- MY *BROTHER?*
GOODBYE, MAZIKEEN MORNINGSTAR.
AND HAVE YOU ENGINEERED A FAIRY TALE ENDING FOR *ME?*
I WOULDN'T DARE. *BEATRICE* WORKS HERE TUESDAYS AND FRIDAYS, THOUGH, IF YOU'RE INTERESTED.
AND ON FRIDAYS THEY HAVE A *HAPPY HOUR.*

--OR *VOLES.* JUST FOR A CHANGE, I MEAN.
VOLES ARE *CUTE.* AND THEY GET A TOUGH *DEAL,* A LOT OF THE TIME.
SURE.
THIS -- THIS IS *IT,* THEN?
GOODBYE?
NEVER GOODBYE, MONA.
IF *DEATH* COULDN'T KEEP US APART, THERE'S NO WAY MY NEW *JOB* IS GONNA DO IT.
I'LL BE LOOKING OVER YOUR *SHOULDER.*
PROMISE.

AND HERE WE GO. DON'T KNOW WHAT I WAS EXPECTING, BUT THIS--
--THIS IS OKAY. I CAN ROLL WITH IT.
MY MIND RUNS OUT ACROSS THE UNIVERSE. FINDS ITS LEVEL. I'M NOT LEAVING. I'M-- ARRIVING. EVERYWHERE AT ONCE.
AND WHATEVER ELSE IT MIGHT BE, IT'S NOT THE END. IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE DEATH.
OPEN
UNLESS A ROCKPOOL DIES, WHEN A WAVE BREAKS OVER IT.
OR WARM BREATH DIES AS IT FADES--
CLOSE
--AND MAKES ITS PEACE WITH AIR.

LUX
Lux

THERE IS *NOTHING.*
THERE IS, HAS BEEN, WILL BE NOTHING.
ALL THE *SAME,* ALWAYS.
BUT *THIS*-- THIS IS A *POSSIBILITY.*
BURGEONING NOW WHERE NOTHING WAS.
AND BEING *SOMETHING* IN THE MIDST OF NOTHING, IT BECOMES THE *CENTER.* THE *FOCUS.*
IT SEEMS TO *GROW.*
IT SEEMS TO *UNFOLD.*
UNTIL IT FILLS THE *SKY* WITH ITS ENDLESS *CONJUGATIONS.*

All We Need of hell

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Special thanks to **NEIL GAIMAN** for the dialogue on pages 19-23
Based on characters created by **GAIMAN, KIETH** and **DRINGENBERG**

IT IS A MATTER OF PERCEPTION.
THERE IS NO TIME HERE, AND NO SPACE.
BJ's macrobiotic RESTAURANT
SO ALL THINGS ARE LAYERED ON THEMSELVES ENDLESSLY, AND PERCEPTION TWISTS AROUND ITS OWN AXIS UNTIL IT IS BLINDED BY FULLNESS, CRIPPLED BY INFINITE REPETITION.
TO DISCIPLINE YOUR EYES AND MIND TO THAT NEW PERSPECTIVE-- TO SEE TIME WHERE NO TIME IS--
--TAKES AN EFFORT OF WILL ALMOST BEYOND IMAGINING.

BUT FOR LUCIFER, NO LONGER MORNINGSTAR, LACK OF RESOLVE HAS NEVER BEEN AN ISSUE.
AND ONCE YOU'VE TRAINED YOUR EYE TO THE VIEW FROM ETERNITY--
--THERE ARE ALL KINDS OF INTERESTING THINGS TO SEE.

AND THIS IS THE HEARTBEAT OF ETERNITY.
CREATIONS RISE, AND THEN THEY FALL.
EACH, SO LONG AS IT EXISTS, SEEMING TO FILL THE IMMENSITY OF THE VOID WITH THE TEEMING, PROLIFERATING CERTAINTIES OF DIRECTION AND PURPOSE.

BUT SINCE THE VOID IS *INFINITE* AND ETERNAL--
--THE PORTION OF IT THAT *CAN* BE FILLED AMOUNTS, IN THE END, TO *ZERO.*
ALL THINGS COME *BACK* TO NOTHING. THAT'S THE *RULE.*
SINCE PAST AND PRESENT HAVE NO REAL *MEANING* HERE, TO ARGUE ABOUT WHETHER *THIS* CREATION CAME BEFORE OR *AFTER* YAHWEH'S IS FUTILE.
ONE AND ONE ARE *NOT* TWO, IF ONE AND ONE CANNOT *MEET.*
DISTANCE IS NOT *TIME.*
AND THIS SURVIVOR IS NOT HIM. BUT HE NOTES, WITHOUT EVEN THE *MILDEST* IMPULSE OF SURPRISE--
--THAT IT IS SOMEONE HE ALREADY *KNOWS.*

WHAT ARE *YOU,* THAT LIVE IN THIS BARREN PLACE?
I DON'T *LIVE* HERE. I'M JUST PASSING *THROUGH.*
LIKE YOU.
LIKE *ME?* I AM THE *SILK MAN,* THE WOVEN MAN. THE CHOSEN OF DESTINY.
I HAVE *CHEATED* DEATH. EVEN THE DEATH OF *ALL* THINGS.
I BELIEVE DEATH HAS HER *OWN* OPINION ABOUT THAT KIND OF *TRANSACTION.*
POSTPONING THE *INEVITABLE* ISN'T CHEATING. JUST STRETCHING THE *RULES* A LITTLE.
YOU ARE *WRONG,* STRANGER. LOOK, ANOTHER CREATION DAWNS.
SO?
SO I WILL *ENTER* IT, AND LIVE AGAIN. AND I WILL *REPEAT* THIS PROCESS ENDLESSLY. LIVE *FOREVER.*
I SHOULD LIKE TO *DEVOUR* YOU. BUT YOU MUST HAVE *SOME* POWER TO HAVE REACHED THIS POINT.
I THINK I WILL *AVOID* CONFRONTING WHAT I DO NOT *KNOW.*
AND SO I BID YOU *FAREWELL.*

PERHAPS HE SHOULD *LEAVE* AT THIS POINT.
HE HAS FAR TO *GO.*
BUT HIS PERCEPTIONS ARE STILL *UNRELIABLE.* THIS MEDIUM IS HARDER TO *FLY* THROUGH THAN AIR.
HE TAKES A MOMENT TO *ORIENT* HIMSELF.
AND SO, WHEN THE *NEXT* CREATION IS BORN--
--HE FINDS HIMSELF *STARING* IT STRAIGHT IN THE EYE.
ABSORBING ITS TWENTY-BILLION-YEAR *STORY* BEFORE HE CAN *BLINK* OR LOOK AWAY.

MICHAEL WILL RELEASE THE POWER FROM WITHIN HIS HEART.
SAMAEL WILL WEAVE IT INTO SUNS.
GABRIEL WILL IMPOSE FORM AND PATTERN ON THE WORLDS AS THEY COOL.
WHY?
BECAUSE THOSE ARE THE ROLES I HAVE ASSIGNED FOR YOU.
WHAT RIGHT HAVE YOU TO ASSIGN? TO DETERMINE OUR ACTIONS?
I AM YOUR MAKER. I CAN UNMAKE YOU JUST AS EASILY.
YES. I UNDERSTAND. YOU ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN WE ARE.
I ACCEPT THAT LOGIC.
FOR NOW.

A BILLION YEARS. A TURN OF THE GLASS. HEAVEN CONVULSES AND *DEVOURS* ITSELF.
HE IS THERE AT THE CENTER. THE *FOCUS*.
THE SEED CRYSTAL OF THIS BEAUTIFUL DISORDER.

YIELD, LUCIFER. YOUR STRENGTH IS BROKEN, YOUR ARMIES ROUTED.
YOU CANNOT PREVAIL.
GABRIEL, MY WAY MAY BE A DEAD END, OR IT MAY LEAD UP INTO THE LIGHT.
EITHER WAY, I CHOOSE IT FOR MYSELF.

and that choice **is** life. So you are already **dead.**
Whoever **wins** or **loses** here.
NO ONE WINS HERE, MY DEAR SONS.
NO ONE **TRIUMPHS.**
WE ENACT OUR OWN **FAILINGS.**
THE **FAULT LINES** IN OUR BEING WHICH BECOME THE FAULT LINES IN OUR **LIVES.**
IN **ALL** THAT WE DO AND MAKE.

all that *we* make? you are the maker, father.
we're only the *tools* you use.
OR AS IT MIGHT BE, THE **ASPECTS** OF MYSELF THROUGH WHICH I **ACT.**
JUST AS **THIS** IS THE ASPECT OF MYSELF THROUGH WHICH I **SPEAK.**
no!
I am *myself.* not a limb or an organ of *yours.*
I *separate* myself from you. you can *kill* me, but you cannot claim me back!
SUPPOSE-- INSTEAD-- I OFFER YOU A **REALM** OF YOUR OWN, TO **RULE** OVER.

what realm?
F-FATHER? WHY WOULD YOU--?
IT IS A VERY LONG **WAY** FROM HERE.
BUT **THAT** NEED NOT TROUBLE US.
what **is** this place?
AS YET, IT IS SCARCELY A **PLACE** AT ALL.
BUT I **INTEND** IT TO BE A PLACE. A **LODGING** FOR CERTAIN SOULS UNHOUSED FROM **FLESH.**
and I would have **dominion** over those souls?

NOT EXACTLY. BUT YOU SAID THAT SEPARATION FROM ME WAS WHAT YOU SOUGHT.
NO PLACE IN CREATION WILL BE FARTHER FROM PRIMUM MOBILE THAN THIS.
AND YOU'LL LEAVE ME UNTROUBLED HERE?
YOU WON'T TRY TO IMPOSE YOUR WILL ON ME?
SAMAEL, THAT WAS NEVER MY DESIRE.
BUT THE PLAN GROWS OUTWARD FROM ME IN ALL DIRECTIONS.
WHETHER I WILL OR NO, I AM THE CENTER OF ORDER. OF DETERMINATION.
FATHER, I ACCEPT. I'LL RULE HERE.
AND I'LL NEVER SEE YOU MORE.
YOUR ANSWER PLEASES ME, SAMAEL. BUT THAT--
--THAT IS MORE THAN I CAN PROMISE.

A THOUSAND TIMES A *THOUSAND* SUFFERING SOULS. THE *MECHANISMS* OF THEIR TORMENT INFINITELY *VARIED*--
--WOVEN INTO A *FABRIC* OF BLACK DEEPER THAN BLACK, PAIN BEYOND THE *REACH* OF PAIN.
IS IT NOT *WONDERFUL*, MORNINGSTAR?
MIRACULOUS, AZAZEL.
WHAT EXACTLY IS THE *POINT* OF IT?
WHY-- TO MAGNIFY YOUR *GLORY*, MY LORD.
MY STATUS ISN'T *CONDITIONAL* ON THE SUFFERINGS OF OTHERS.
NO, LORD. BUT STILL, THE AGONIES-- THE *DEGRADATIONS*-- THEY FILL ONE'S HEART WITH--
WITH A MILD *DISTASTE*. A FEELING OF BEING *TAINTED*, AT MANY REMOVES, BY SOMEONE *ELSE'S* PETTY SPITE.
WHAT WAS THE *NEXT* ORDER OF BUSINESS? A REQUEST FOR *ASYLUM*, I BELIEVE.
RHESZ, NGY RROAHD.
I RHISZH TO *SZHERVE* RHOU.
VHAT RAZH *NEE*, NGY RROAHD.
MAZIKEEN. DAUGHTER OF LILITH.
I THINK WE MET *BEFORE*. A LONG TIME AGO. ARE YOU *SURE* YOU WANT TO LIVE HERE?

TO SERVE ME?
WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO DO THAT?
VECAUVHE RHOU HAGH VHUILT A HHREAT RHONGHER. A NGARTHELOUFH FHINGH.
I DIDN'T BUILD THIS PLACE. IT GREW AROUND ME.
AND VECAUVHE RHOU ARE VHE VHRINHHER OF RRIGHT.
HERE IS THE TRUTH, DAUGHTER OF LILITH. I SWALLOWED A BAITED HOOK. ALLOWED MYSELF TO BECOME-- JUST YAHWEH'S NEGATIVE. YAHWEH'S SHADOW.
HE FOOLED ME. HE WON'T DO IT AGAIN.
SERVE ME IF YOU WILL. I'LL NEVER THANK YOU FOR IT.
YOUR COMING AND YOUR GOING WILL NEVER IMPINGE ON MY ATTENTION.
BUT THIS IS A CUSP OF CHANGE. IF YOU STAY, YOU MAY LIVE THROUGH INTERESTING TIMES.
KEEP THE FACE.
IT SUITS YOU.

THERE. THOSE WERE THE LAST OF THEM. WE'RE THE ONLY ENTITIES LEFT IN HELL, MORPHEUS.
I WAS THE FIRST ONE HERE, AND IT LOOKS LIKE I'M GOING TO BE THE LAST.
Lucifer, what is HAPPENING?
I KEEP TELLING YOU, DREAM LORD. IT'S OVER.
I AM LEAVING. AND I HAVE CLOSED DOWN HELL.
How? How can you even--?
EASY. TEN BILLION YEARS I'VE SPENT IN THIS PLACE. THAT'S A LONG TIME.
AND WE'VE ALL CHANGED SINCE THE BEGINNING.
I'M TIRED, MORPHEUS.
SO TIRED.

You KNEW me when I was an angel. What was I LIKE?
You were very PROUD, Samael.
But you were also very BEAUTIFUL, and wise-- and PASSIONATE.
Was I? Yes. Yes, I WAS. I cared about so MANY things.
I suppose that was why everything began to go WRONG.
You know-- I still wonder how much of it was PLANNED.
How much of it He KNEW in advance.
I thought I was REBELLING. I thought I was DEFYING His rule.
No. I was merely FULFILLING another tiny segment of His great and powerful PLAN.
But I'm WOOLGATHERING. I apologize.
You don't mind if I WORK as we talk? There are no more entities left within the bounds infernal, but I need to SECURE the last gates.

You also rule a *world*, Morpheus. A world of sleepers and dreamers, of *stories*.
A *simple* place compared to Hell.
I *envy* you.
Can you *imagine* what it was like?
Ten billion *years* spent providing a place for dead mortals to *torture* themselves?
And like *all* masochists, they called the shots. "Burn me." "Freeze me." "Eat me." "Hurt me."
And we *did*.
Why do they blame *me* for all their little failings?
They use my *name* as if I spent my entire *day* sitting on their shoulders, *forcing* them to commit acts they would otherwise find repulsive.
"The *Devil* made me do it."
I have never made *one* of them do anything.
Never.

And then they *die*, and they come here, having transgressed against what they *believed* to be right.
And expect *us* to fulfill their desire for pain and retribution. I don't *make* them come here.
They talk of me going around and *buying* souls, like a fishwife come market day, never stopping to ask themselves *why*.
I *need* no souls. And how can anyone *own* a soul?
No, they belong to themselves.
They just hate to have to face up to it.
Yes, I *rebelled*. It was a *long* time ago. How long was I meant to pay for that one action?
So now it's *over*. I've sent all of them *away*. All of Hell's inhabitants.
Where-- have you sent them?
Away. I don't *care* where they've gone. Heaven. Earth. Limbo. The far realms. Who *knows?*
But they won't be coming *here* anymore.

And what will YOU do now?
I DON'T KNOW. TO BE HONEST, DREAM LORD, I HAVEN'T GIVEN IT MUCH THOUGHT.
I COULDN'T RETURN TO THE SILVER CITY-- EVEN IF I WISHED TO.
I COULD NEVER AGAIN BE AN ANGEL.
INNOCENCE, ONCE LOST, CAN NEVER BE REGAINED.
WHAT WILL I DO NOW?
I COULD LIE ON A BEACH SOMEWHERE, PERHAPS? LISTEN TO MUSIC? BUILD A HOUSE?
LEARN HOW TO DANCE OR TO PLAY THE PIANO?
IT MATTERS NOT.
I HAVE HAD MY FILL OF THE OLD LIFE, AND THAT IS ALL I CARE ABOUT.
PERHAPS THIS IS THE ULTIMATE FREEDOM, EH, DREAM LORD?
THE FREEDOM TO LEAVE.

TO SEE THESE *SCENES* AGAIN UNSETTLES-- EVEN *ANGERS--* HIM.
HIS *CALM,* WHICH HE VALUES HIGHLY, IS *THREATENED* BY IT.
SO HE'S ALMOST *RELIEVED* TO HAVE HIS ATTENTION DISTRACTED.
AS SOMETHING *ELSE* BREAKS FREE OF ITS *MOORINGS* WITHIN CREATION--
BJ's
macrobiotic
RESTAURANT
--TO STAND PROUD ABOVE THE IMPLODING *UNIVERSE* WHICH BORE IT.

LUCIFER! IT'S *LUCIFER!*
BERIM, WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE?*
I, SANDALPHON? I'VE DONE *NOTHING.*
THE *BARROWJANE* HAS BREACHED INTO THE VOID BEYOND CREATION.
AND I FIND IT HIGHLY *SIGNIFICANT* THAT WE FIND THE MORNINGSTAR HERE.
GOOD *MORROW* TO YOU, LIGHTBRINGER.
BERIM.
WHAT *BUSINESS* BRINGS YOU TO THIS GREAT NOTHING?
I'M ON MY WAY TO SOMEWHERE *ELSE.*
LIKE *YOU.*
YOU ARE *EXILED.* THAT'S WHAT YOU MEAN, ISN'T IT?
EXILED OR *ORPHANED.* I KNEW IT!

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN,* BERIM?
LOOK AT HIM. ISN'T IT *OBVIOUS?*
IF IT *WAS,* I WOULDN'T BE ASKING.
LOOK AT HIS *FACE.* THIS WAR WE HAVE AGREED TO FIGHT-- HE COMES TO US FROM A TIME WHEN IT HAS *ALREADY* BEEN FOUGHT.
HE'S HERE BECAUSE WE *WON* AND TOOK HIS *HOME* AWAY FROM HIM.
CAN THIS *BE?*
IT *MUST* BE. HE'S WOUNDED. HE HAS NO AURA OF *POWER* ABOUT HIM. NO FIRE OR BRIMSTONE.
HE'S *BEATEN.* BEATEN AND *BROKEN.*
LUCIFER.
LILITH.
IF MY ACTIONS *BRING* YOU TO THIS STATE, THEN I'M *SORRY* FOR IT.
DON'T *CONCERN* YOURSELF.
YOUR *FUTURE* IS MY PAST.
THERE'S NOTHING IN IT THAT LEAVES ME WITH ANY SENSE OF *GRIEVANCE* TOWARDS YOU.

HE IS *AFRAID.* BY HIS OWN ADMISSION, HIS DESTINY NO LONGER *BEARS* ON OURS.
WE COULD KILL HIM WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE.
NO.
THAT YOU COULD *NOT.*
HE SAVED MY *LIFE,* AND THE LIVES OF MY CHILDREN, I HAVE NO *QUARREL* WITH HIM.
NOR I. BUT I HAVE A *HUNGER* THAT--
COMRADES.
WE HAVE *ANOTHER* VISITOR.

microbiot
RESTAUR
SAMAEL.
FATHER.
TH-THAT IS--
EVIDENTLY. LET'S RETIRE INSIDE.
WHAT PASSES BETWEEN THEM IS NO CONCERN OF OURS.
I'M HAPPY TO SEE YOU HERE.
OUTSIDE OF THE PLAN.

inside or outside, our relationship remains the same.
you made me. that doesn't get any easier to bear.
CAN WE SET THAT GRIEVANCE *ASIDE* FOR A WHILE AND SPEAK OF *OTHER* THINGS?
my *honest* opinion?
no. we *can't.*
WHAT CAN I *GET* YOU GUYS?
DARJEELING, PLEASE. WITH LEMON.
nothing for me.
but perhaps we can *pretend* to speak of other things.
EXCELLENT!
AN *ADMIRABLE* COMPROMISE.
LET'S TAKE A TABLE AT THE *EDGE* OF THE TERRACE.
WE CAN WATCH THE *CREATIONS* ENJOY THEIR BRIEF *EFFLORESCENCES.*

SO. HAS ELAINE MADE A GOOD START?
I'D SAY SO. SHE PUT RIGHT THE MESS YOU LEFT HER WITH.
I THOUGHT SHE SHOWED PROMISE.
IT'S NO EASY TASK, THOUGH. OMNIPOTENCE IS A GREAT BURDEN.
AND ETERNITY IS A VERY LONG TIME.
A PLEA FOR UNDERSTANDING, FATHER? THAT'S GROTESQUE.
LIKE THAT BODY YOU'VE CHOSEN TO DRESS UP IN.
ONE DARJEELING. ONE NOTHING.
ENJOY.
I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU A STORY, IF YOU'LL ALLOW ME.
ONE YOU ALREADY KNOW.
IS THERE ANYTHING I COULD SAY THAT WOULD PREVENT YOU?

IT'S A TALE THAT **WU CH'ENG-EN** TELLS ABOUT THE **MONKEY** KING.
IT RECOUNTS THE MONKEY KING'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE **BUDDHA.**
"THE MONKEY KING **BOASTED** TO THE ENLIGHTENED ONE OF HIS GREAT STRENGTH, CUNNING AND RESOURCEFULNESS.
"BUDDHA SAID NOTHING IN REPLY, HAVING **NOTHING** IN PARTICULAR TO **PROVE.**
"BUDDHA'S **SILENCE** DROVE THE MONKEY KING TO FURTHER AND FURTHER **EXTREMES.**
"YOU THINK YOU'RE SO **GREAT,** HE SHOUTED. YOU OLD, FAT, SLEEPY GOD! **I** AM GREATER THAN YOU.
"WATCH, AND I'LL **PROVE** IT.
"THEN HE **GIRDED** HIMSELF AND MADE A MIGHTY **LEAP.**
"HIS STRONG **LEGS** PROPELLING HIM HIGH INTO THE AIR--
"--AND ACROSS ALL THE **WORLDS**--"

"--UNTIL HE LANDED ON THE OTHER SIDE OF **INFINITY.**
"WHERE FIVE **COLUMNS** OF WHITE STONE HOLD UP THE ROOF OF THE **SKY.**
"TO PROVE THAT HE'D **BEEN** HERE, HE CARVED HIS **NAME** ON THE MIDDLE COLUMN, SCORING DEEP INTO THE **STONE.**
"THEN A **SECOND** LEAP TOOK HIM **BACK** ACROSS THE FACE OF CREATION.
猴
"BACK TO THE **BUDDHA.**"

"AND HE TOLD THE BUDDHA OF WHAT HE HAD DONE.
"COULD YOU JUMP SO FAR? HE DEMANDED. YOU, SO OLD AND FAT.
"COULD YOU TRAVEL ALL THE WAY TO WHERE THE WORLDS END, IN A SINGLE JUMP?
"THE BUDDHA MADE NO ANSWER IN WORDS.
"BUT MERELY RAISED HIS RIGHT HAND, AND SHOWED IT TO THE MONKEY KING--
" --WHO RECOGNIZED HIS OWN SIGNATURE ON THE BUDDHA'S INDEX FINGER."
猴
In CONTEXT I FIND THAT PRETTY OFFENSIVE.
PERHAPS IT IS. I WAS MAKING A POINT ABOUT FUTILITY.
YOU WERE MAKING A POINT ABOUT HOLDING ALL THE CARDS.
YOU CANNOT BE YOUR OWN MAKER, SAMAEL.
NONE OF US CAN.

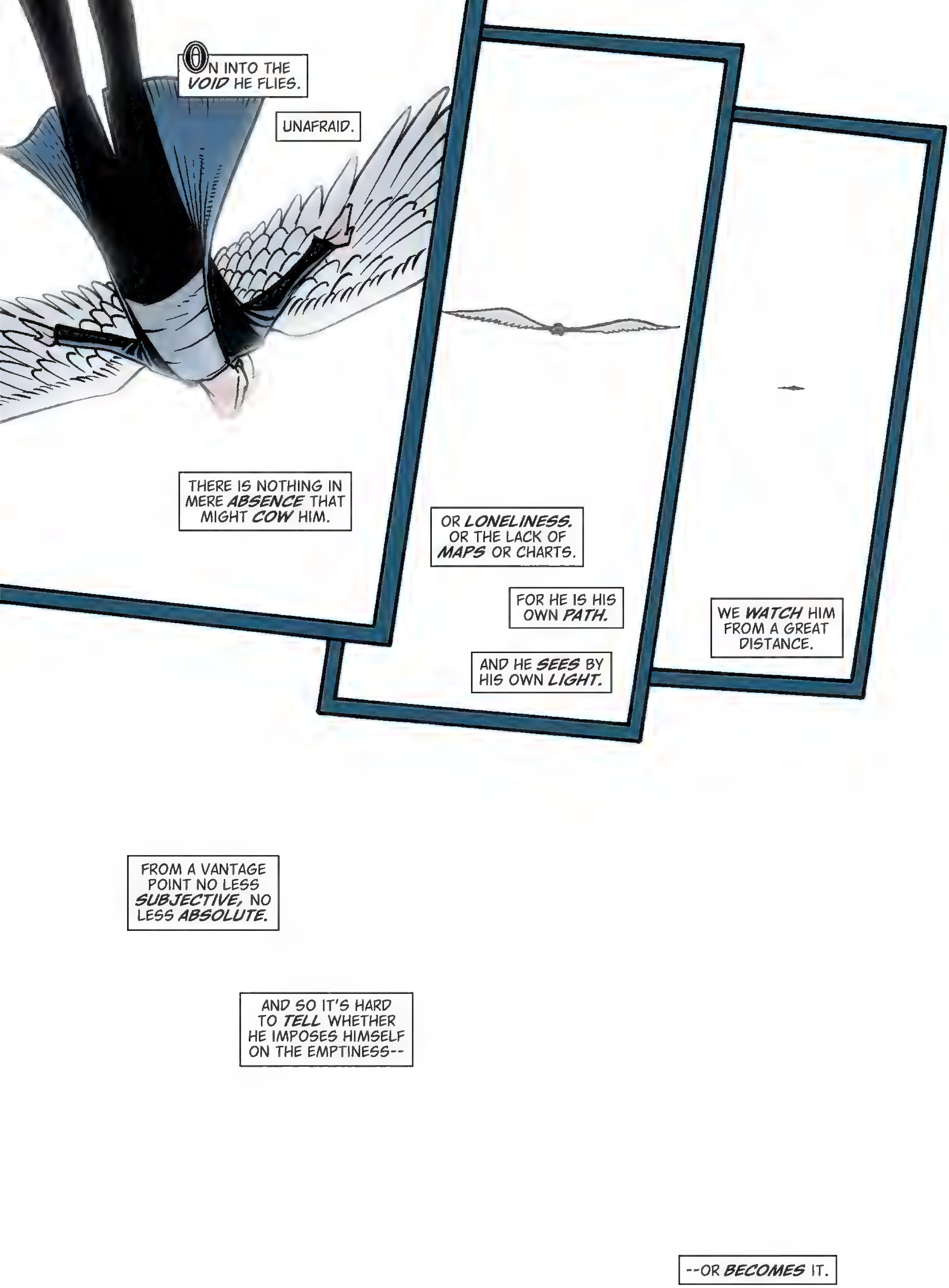
YOU SEEM TO HAVE MANAGED WELL ENOUGH.
I?
NO.
TRUE, I'M **INFINITE** AND ETERNAL.
BUT EVEN I WAS SHAPED BY FORCES **EXTERNAL** TO ME. YOU KNOW WHAT THEY ARE.
YOU'VE BEEN **UNHAPPY** BECAUSE YOU'VE DESIRED THINGS THAT CANNOT BE.
THAT'S WHAT DESIRE ***IS.*** THE NEED FOR WHAT WE CAN'T ***HAVE.***
THE NEED FOR WHAT'S READILY ***AVAILABLE*** IS CALLED GREED.
AND FUTILE OR NOT, MY ***STRUGGLE*** AGAINST YOU HAS ***SHAPED*** ME INTO WHAT I AM.
DO YOU EXPECT ME TO ***APOLOGIZE*** FOR IT?
BY NO **MEANS.**

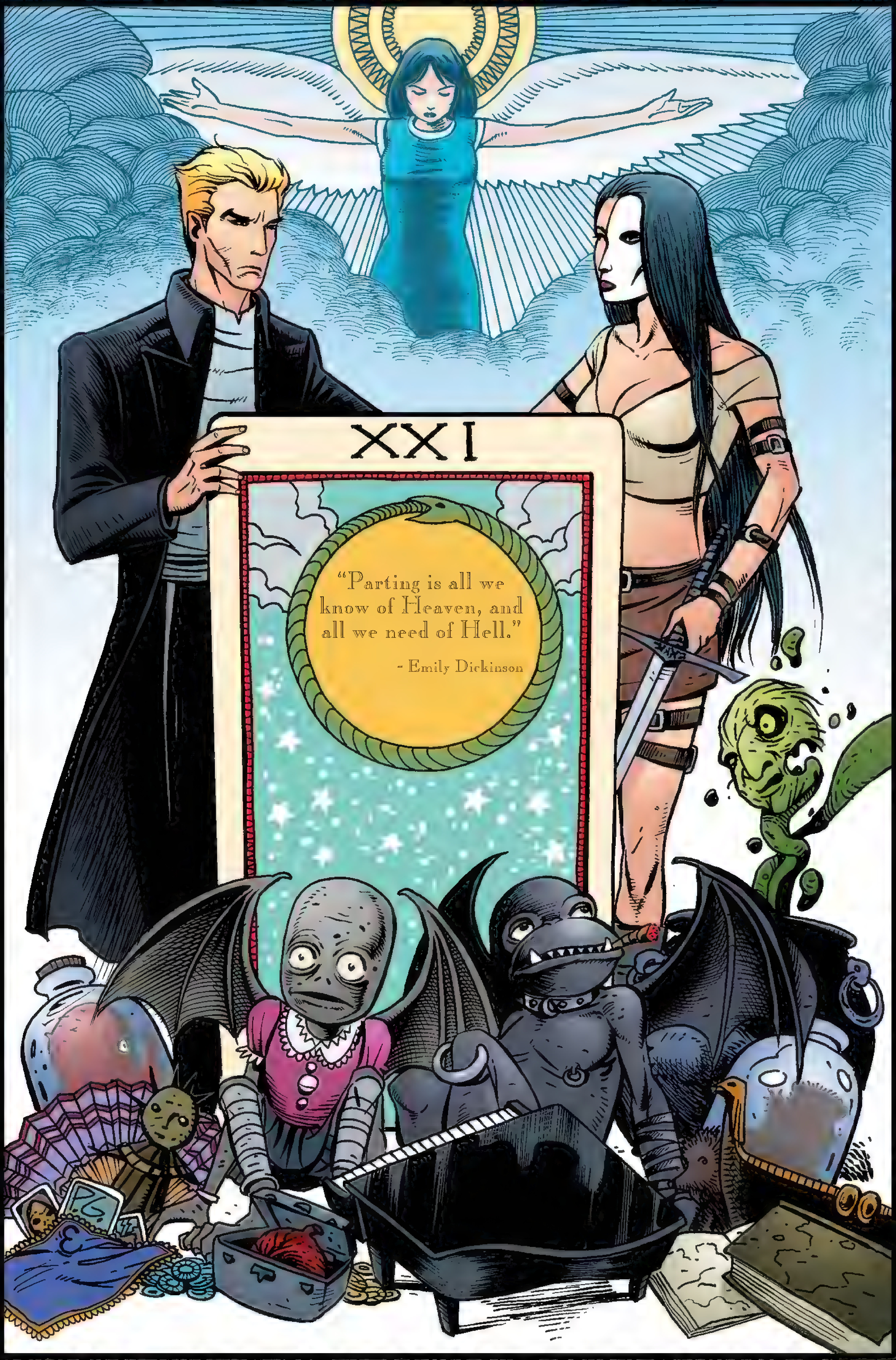
AND BY THE SAME TOKEN, I CAN'T APOLOGIZE TO YOU-- OR MAKE YOU ANY AMENDS--
--FOR THE CRIME OF BEING YOUR FATHER.
WE STOPPED PRETENDING VERY QUICKLY, DIDN'T WE?
I DON'T NEED AN APOLOGY. OR A RATIONALE. OR COMPENSATION.
YOU HAVE NOTHING TO GIVE ME.
ACTUALLY, I HAVE ONE THING. THAT'S WHY I CAME.
I PROPOSE A POTLATCH, SAMAEL.
IT MEANS AN EXCHANGE OF GIFTS. GIFTS SO PRECIOUS THAT--
THAT THEIR LOSS WILL RUIN US. I KNOW WHAT THE WORD MEANS.
WHAT GIFTS DID YOU HAVE IN MIND?

I WILL GIVE YOU **MYSELF.**
MY THOUGHTS. MY **EXPERIENCES.** MY MEMORIES.
AND YOU WILL GIVE ME **YOURS.**
ARE YOU DEVELOPING A SENSE OF **HUMOR?**
NO. I'M **SERIOUS.**
THEN YOU MUST IMAGINE YOU'RE TALKING TO ONE OF MY DEAD **BROTHERS.**
HAVING TRIED SO LONG AND SO HARD TO **ESCAPE** YOU--
--WHY DO YOU THINK I'D AGREE TO **BECOME** YOU?
YOU **MISUNDERSTAND** ME. WE WOULD NOT **EXCHANGE** IDENTITIES.
WE WOULD BECOME TWO **NEW** BEINGS, EACH POSSESSING BOTH **YOUR** MEMORIES AND **MINE.**
SO EACH OF US WOULD BE THE HOT **METAL** TO THE OTHER'S **MOLD.**
AS WE FLOW **TOGETHER** INTO OUR FINAL SHAPES. YOU UNDERSTAND?
AS FAR AS I *WANT* TO.

AH. THIS SUBSTRATE ON WHICH WE STAND IS ABOUT TO DIVE.
RETURNING TO ITS OWN OR ANOTHER CREATION.
AND THERE GO OUR HOSTS WITH IT. NO DOUBT RELIEVED TO BE RID OF US BOTH.
WELL? HAVE YOU CONSIDERED?
microbiotic
RESTARAUNT
I DON'T NEED TO CONSIDER.
WHAT YOU'RE DESCRIBING SOUNDS LIKE DEATH TO ME.
NO, SAMAEL. THIS WOULD BE LIFE.
LIFE BEING WHAT ARISES WHEN THE SELF THROWS DOWN ITS BARRICADES AND LETS THE WORLD BREAK IN.

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN THE ONE WHO SAID NO TO YOU, FATHER.
THAT WAS HOW YOU MADE ME.
SO I PRESUME YOU'RE ONLY TESTING YOUR WORKMANSHIP.
IF YOU AGREE-- YOU WOULD BE THE MAKER.
AND YOU WOULD BE PERFECT AGAIN. UNFALLEN. UNSCARRED BY EXPERIENCE.
WAS THIS MY FUNCTION, THEN?
YOU ESCAPED YOUR FUNCTION.
THAT'S EXACTLY WHY I WANT TO KNOW YOU BETTER.
UNSCARRED? YOU TEACH ME, FATHER, THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING.
THIS FACE IS MINE. THIS SCAR-- IS MINE.
YOU MAY NOT HAVE THEM. NOT WITH MY PERMISSION.
MY ANSWER IS NO.
THEN GO WELL, SAMAEL, MY SON. GO FAR. STOP FOR NOTHING.
I GIVE YOU MY BLESSING. AND THIS TIME MY PROMISE, TOO.
I WILL NOT SEE YOU AGAIN.


ON INTO THE *VOID* HE FLIES.
UNAFRAID.
THERE IS NOTHING IN MERE *ABSENCE* THAT MIGHT *COW* HIM.
OR *LONELINESS.* OR THE LACK OF *MAPS* OR CHARTS.
FOR HE IS HIS OWN *PATH.*
AND HE *SEES* BY HIS OWN *LIGHT.*
WE *WATCH* HIM FROM A GREAT DISTANCE.
FROM A VANTAGE POINT NO LESS *SUBJECTIVE,* NO LESS *ABSOLUTE.*
AND SO IT'S HARD TO *TELL* WHETHER HE IMPOSES HIMSELF ON THE EMPTINESS--
--OR *BECOMES* IT.


XXI
"Parting is all we know of Heaven, and all we need of Hell."
- Emily Dickinson

Thanks and best wishes to all who came with us on this journey. Thanks, too, to those who made it possible. To Alisa Kwitney, for commissioning the Morningstar Option and acting as its midwife and mechanic. To Karen Berger, for approving and helping to shape the monthly book at its outset. To Duncan Fegredo and Michael Wm. Kaluta, the cover artists who gave us our identity on the shelves. To Christopher Moeller and Dean Ormston, our dark alter egos. To Danny Vozzo, Scott Hampton, Jon J Muth, P. Craig Russell, Ryan Kelly, and all the other artists who lit up hell with their visions along the way. To Neil Gaiman, who was endlessly generous with time, advice and encouragement. To our partners, Lin and Jeanne, who jammed and brainstormed and free-associated and sketched out with us. And to Shelly Bond (who was still a Roeberg way back when we set out), for reasons as numerous as the words we've written and the panels we've drawn.

Mike Carey & Peter Gross

AFTERWORD

THE DEVIL'S BUSINESS

The thing about bargains with the devil is that he always cheats. That's the first and last rule, and there's no getting around it, no matter how clever you are.

The bargain I made was that I'd tell his story — or rather, the next installment of his story, after the chapters already told in the Bible, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and Neil Gaiman's THE SANDMAN. That, you could say, was my side of the deal.

The devil's side was that he'd do what I told him to: be a fixed signifier in the story I wanted to tell, and mean what I wanted him to mean. I had a pretty cool idea, or so I thought at the time, for a suite of stories that would put the Adversary through his paces and turn him into a mouthpiece for some ideas I had bouncing around in my head — ideas about predestination and free will, the struggle that children face in defining themselves against their parents, the strengths and limitations of faith, and the role of religion in the lives of individuals and societies.

It seemed pretty much foolproof. But the devil cheats.

Neil Gaiman had told me at the outset, when I was putting together the pitch for the LUCIFER book — which included a very full outline for the first three years of stories — that writing a monthly book was very much a learning experience. You couldn't appreciate from the outside, he said, what a complex collage of pre-planning, serendipity and spur-of-the-moment improvisation the whole project becomes. I remember answering that it was hard to believe there was anything in THE SANDMAN that hadn't been planned from the start, because so many of its ends are in its beginnings. He told me that I'd be surprised.

And he was right, of course. Going into LUCIFER, I knew the shape of the story I wanted to tell and I knew how it would end. The creation of Lucifer's Cosmos, the abdication of Yahweh and the second war in Heaven were all there in my head, along with most of the plot architecture for the "Divine Comedy" stories and the "Morningstar" arc. And I knew from the moment Elaine was introduced (in issue 4) where she'd end up and what she'd eventually have to become.

But there were, as Neil had predicted, things that just happened because they happened. The centaur stories in issues 24, 41 and 70 were only written because at the start of the "Paradiso" arc, Peter Gross had drawn a very striking centaur galloping through one of Lucifer's gates, and Chris Moeller had painted another equally imposing figure on the cover of issue 21. I started to ponder on those characters, and on what a centaur society would be like, which was the genesis of Esa-Hane and her illustrious but unfortunate lineage.

Gaudium was another complete surprise. Initially he was just a plot device: someone who could bridge the gap between Elaine and her father, Michael, and tell both her and the reader things that they needed to hear. But once I saw Peter's initial sketches, and started to write the voice that went with that grotesque face, I found him hard to put down. He annexed three whole issues for himself, the arrogant little bugger, and ended up introducing us to his whole damned (and otherwise) family. He became our equivalent of a Shakespearean fool, appearing at the moments where we were aspiring towards high tragedy to puncture the pretensions of many of our core cast. My favorite Gaudium line is the aside he makes after correctly identifying Remiel as the former ruler of Hell — "which is a thing any schmendrick can add to his résumé these days."

And then there was the devil: the devil himself.

The trouble was that from a very early stage, Lucifer didn't *want* to be my mouthpiece. More than any other character I've ever written, he insisted on going his own way. His touchy pride and perverse integrity were always going to be keynotes of his character, but the friendships he formed — maybe that's too strong a word, but the few times when he accorded some other living being something like respect — happened at first in spite of my instincts. Why should Lucifer be courteous to Duma after tearing Remiel into pathetically imploding shreds? Why should he offer his brother, Michael, a partnership which almost explicitly recognizes him as an equal? Why should he allow Elaine and Mona to break his own first commandment and become de facto goddesses in his god-free cosmos? That softening of the satanic hard line wasn't something that was in the initial plan.

Neither was the destruction of the Mansions of the Silence, which is perhaps the most ruthless thing we see Lucifer doing in the whole of the series' almost two thousand pages. That casual gesture, cutting through the complexities of a disintegrating situation and achieving his own primary goal at the cost of billions of souls, is in some ways entirely characteristic of his nature — a revealing and defining moment — but that doesn't mean I saw it coming. It was just that when I brought him to the brink of that particular abyss, there seemed to be no escape from the logic of the Luciferian perspective: if you didn't care about consequences except in relation to yourself, that's what you'd do.

I'm not complaining about any of this. In fact, I think I was lucky that my protagonist turned out to belong to that rare subspecies of characters who — to paraphrase Neil again — have their own lives off the page and move while you're not looking. It made up for some of my own inadequacies as a writer, at that stage of my career, that my protagonist had such an unerring sense of direction. It was never possible for me to reverse the classic situation and lead Lucifer astray.

I've been lucky in other ways, too. Lucky to be making my approaches to Vertigo at that particular time, from that particular direction. Writing LUCIFER, as a miniseries and then as a monthly, meant that I got to work with and learn from two of the most formidable editorial talents I've ever met — Alisa Kwitney and Shelly Bond. In many ways, I've never looked back. Those two ladies made me look at stories from angles I'd never found for myself. I know enough about the industry now (although I didn't back then) to realize that that's far from being a normal part of the package.

Lucky in the artists I've collaborated with. If it hadn't been for LUCIFER, I might never have met Peter Gross, Chris Moeller, Dean Ormston, Jon J Muth, Duncan Fegredo, Michael Kaluta, Ryan Kelly or a dozen other people who gave face and form to my ideas and added their own incomparable tones and accents to the mix. To imagine LUCIFER without Peter is to imagine a completely different book, not just in appearance but in substance: his influence on the storytelling in LUCIFER is pervasive and it is fundamental. I literally couldn't have done it, or anything like it, without him. And yet he didn't come on board until issue 5, and he might not have come at all if it hadn't been for a sequence of events — Chris Weston and James Hodgkins leaving the book — that seemed at the time like a catastrophe. Serendipity comes in strange disguises.

Lucky in finding an audience that got what we were doing and stayed with us throughout, many of them after finding out that LUCIFER was a very different animal from THE SANDMAN and spoke in a different voice (although I began by mimicking Neil; it took until "Born With the Dead," Elaine's first appearance, before I had the courage to go my own way). In the early days, it felt like a pretty exclusive club. A lot of the regular readers used to hang out on the Vertigo message board, and we had some wild times there: I won't soon forget the Morningstar High homework assignments, the Tales of Lost Teas, or the Lucifer Smiley-Face Masterpiece Theatre. In my wardrobe I still have a T-shirt which bears the legend *quae nocent saepe docent* (loosely, "pain is the great teacher"), a gift from Lucifer message board stalwart Michael Troestl.

And finally, lucky that Vertigo works in the way it does, uniquely allowing creative teams to tell long but finite stories which build towards a specific end point and stop when they get there. Lucifer is not my character: I have no say at all in how he's used beyond the confines of the story I've already written. But Shelly and Karen have always let me steer my own course and — crucially — choose the final harbor.

Over the seven years that I wrote LUCIFER, my life changed beyond recognition. My Faustian bargain brought riches and worldly success, at least according to my definition of those terms: invitations to try out for other books; enough cash coming in to quit teaching and devote all my time to writing; the chance to pick up the professional skills which I pretended at the outset I already had.

Of course, given that the devil cheats, it was sort of inevitable that the price for all of this was going to be high. I'm paying it now, in the form of a kind of creative cold turkey. I'll never write another Lucifer story: we've reached the end of our unequal collaboration, and he goes his way, I go mine. It's really hard after eight years to — I was going to say "put the pen down," but most of the time I wasn't using a pen — to hit SEND and step back from the keyboard. It's hard and it's strange.

Lucifer never became my mouthpiece, but he does get to be a voice inside my head. I think he always will be.

— Mike Carey
September 2006

"If there's an heir to the comics writing tradition of Neil Gaiman's THE SANDMAN, it's Carey [and his] the spinoff series LUCIFER."

— Publishers Weekly

"Comic book veteran Mike Carey is a pro at crafting unsettling stories that call the concepts of evil and monsters into question."

— A.V. Club/The Onion

"The best fantasy comic around."

— Comics International

"Parting is all we know of Heaven, and all we need of Hell."

War has come to Heaven. A new host, born of Lilith, marches against the Silver City, and Lucifer Morningstar must descend into his former realm to find an army willing to defend its holy walls. But the Lightbringer's powers are waning, and Hell has a new king — one who is not at all sympathetic to Lucifer's cause.

As the chaos spreads across two creations, sinking worlds into despair and bleeding their souls into the void, the champions of light will make their last stand on the plain of Armageddon: a fallen angel, a demon, and a human woman facing down the wolf of destruction and an immortal army that cannot be numbered.

The odds are hopeless. For the First of the Fallen, however, victory promises freedom — the ultimate freedom to choose his own fate. For that, he will risk everything — and everyone — in existence.

Transcending the pages of Neil Gaiman's groundbreaking series THE SANDMAN, the Lightbringer concludes his epic journey in LUCIFER BOOK FIVE, written by Mike Carey and illustrated by Peter Gross, Ryan Kelly, Colleen Doran, Michael Wm. Kaluta, Zander Cannon, and Dean Ormston. Collecting issues 62-75 of the Eisner Award-nominated series, this volume also features an introduction and an afterword from the author.

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